PEACOCK FEATHERS

Temple Bailey

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She Was Leaning Against One of the Trees

PEACOCK FEATHERS

BY

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THE DIM LANTERN,
THE TRUMPETER SWAN,
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Peacock Feathers

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To
E. L. S.

BOOK ONE
MY FATHER

PEACOCK FEATHERS

CHAPTER I

1

As I look back upon it, I can, I think, understand how I came to build my romance on the shifting sands of misrepresentation. Even as a little boy my fancy had at times painted things not as they were, but as I wanted them to be. If I had lied, I had lied picturesquely, transmuting sober fact into fascinating fiction. Now and then, since my mother lacked imagination, I had been punished for it. And I can remember my father's whimsical plea for a light sentence.

"Let the boy alone, Eleanor; he'll outgrow it."

"But he is not telling the truth, Stephen."

"How many of us know the truth?"

And there you have my father and my mother in a nutshell—she with her fixed ideas of right and wrong, he seeking always the hidden meanings of life and of eternity.

For he believed in eternity. He was a clergyman in a small country church. We felt ourselves poor, but I know now that my father was rich. He

possessed the great treasures of an open mind, and a faith in the essential rightness of the world. We took long walks together. We were Western New Yorkers, and the vineyards were everywhere. They formed the texts of many of my father's sermons. "Take us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines," and "What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do?"

When we walked together my father was not the preacher, but the man. He worshiped beauty, and as Lake Erie rose up before us like a sapphire wall, the setting sun a luminous red balloon above it, he would say in a hushed voice, "God made it, Jerry!"

Yet I knew he would have worshiped it if he had never known a God!

They had called me Jerome, after my father's brother. He lived somewhere in the West, but I had never seen him. I thought of him as one thinks of the magical, mystical people in books. There was a picture of him, too, taken during the Spanish War. He had been one of Roosevelt's Rough Riders—and in his khaki and wide-brimmed hat he seemed quite outside the sphere of ordinary mortals.

As I have said, we were very poor in those days when I was punished for telling lies. My mother did her own work, and my father and I helped her. We used to wash the clothes on Monday morn-

ings, hidden in the woodshed so that any passing member of the congregation might not be shocked by a lack of ministerial dignity. I think my father would have told of it, for he had no sense of shame in honest labor, but my mother held him to the traditional pose. It was she who insisted that he must never be seen in overalls. He fed the cow in his long coat, and milked her with it folded beside him on another stool, so that it might be ready in emergencies.

I can see now that my mother was right. The people in that small community had their sense of fitness. A minister belongs to his coat as a justice belongs to his robes, or a soldier to his uniform. Strip them of these, and what have you?

Yet when I was a boy I often wished that my father was like some of the men who came to our little church in summer. Men from the city, trim in blue serge, stiff straw hats, tan shoes and silk stockings. When I was ten years old, an automobile stopped at our door. Two young people had driven up from Buffalo to get married. The boy had a white rose in the lapel of his coat, and the girl wore a small, round hat with white roses and held up her thin dress to show a lace petticoat.

Before that I had not been allowed in the room when there was a wedding. But this time my father let me stay, and I was much impressed by the things the young man said to the young woman,

and that the woman said to the man. "With this ring I thee wed . . . to have and to hold . . . from this day forward . . . for richer, for poorer . . ."

I talked a great deal about it afterward to my mother. "Did you say those things when you married father?"

"Yes."

"Did he give you a ring?"

"Yes."

She showed me her wedding ring, which I had seen all my life on her finger, but from that moment it gained a new significance, and whenever I looked at her work-worn hands and thought of the slim white fingers of the young bride, I was disturbed by a conviction that my mother had not, in some way, fulfilled the promise of the radiant ceremony. I felt that it would be different with the girl in the white rose hat. That she would go through life in trailing frocks and always in bridal elegance.

Even in those days I was like my father in my passion for loveliness. Our little house was comfortable, but there was nothing esthetic in its furnishings, save the effect of clean bareness, and the touches of clear color given by pots of flowers on the window ledges, and by some old blue china on the dresser.

I never liked the clothes that my mother wore —her dull lilac prints and best black dresses. But

my soul would flame when a wagon laden with grapes went by, with one of the Italian girls who worked in the vineyards enthroned like a bacchante high on the purple load. These girls set off their dark charms by a blouse or kerchief of brilliant color—orange or jade or scarlet. Whatever they wore, they were never monotonous or insipid, as were the girls of our congregation in their faint pinks and blues, or the women in their grays and blacks.

The coming of the Italians and other peoples of Southern Europe had introduced a new element into our community. A Catholic church was built that they might have their own priests and their own altars. They were at home in our vineyards, and the lake seemed to make up in some slight way for the loss of their own seas and bays. The winters were hard on them, but they bore the cold with cheerfulness, and their gay attire illumined the whiteness of our days.

Some of the young Italian girls were enchanting. I kissed one of them in an autumn twilight and confessed it afterward to my father. I had not intended to tell him; but as he and I walked together under the stars, I felt a sort of ecstatic urge to confession.

"Did you ever kiss a woman, father?"

"I have kissed your mother, of course."

"But before that?"

He grew at once austere. "Why are you asking me, Jerry?"

"I kissed a girl tonight—Theresa."

We walked on for a moment in silence, then he said, "Why did you kiss her?"

"Well, she was so pretty!"

"That is no reason for kissing a woman."

"What would be a reason?"

There was another long stretch of silence, then he spoke. "When you hold the soul of a woman in your hand, Jerry, and she holds your soul in hers, then thank God—and kiss her."

I can not convey to you the strength of the passion that was in his voice. Not the passion of earth, but the passion of high idealism which he strove to implant in the heart of his little son.

I have often wondered whether my mother met the deeps of my father's nature. Looking back upon it in these later years, I am forced to doubt it. Yet I am sure that he believed in the romance which he had begun with her, and he held the hope that in some transcendent future my mother might be stripped of her sheath of petty preoccupations.

I am sure, too, that he turned to me for the satisfying of certain needs. Our imaginations met. I was his child in the sense that I aspired and thrilled as he did, though I lacked always the goodness and strength which made him transmute his emotions into splendid deeds and unselfish devotion.

It was in an excess of youthful ardor that I had kissed Theresa.

I had been sent to get the cows, who followed a path from our pasture down through a lane which was bounded on one side by a neighbor's vineyard. The grapes were being harvested, and I loitered when I came to the gate where the wagons drawn by a pair of great horses stood waiting for the filled crates.

The girls picked the fruit, and the men lifted the crates and carried them to the wagons. I opened the gate and made my way along the aisles between the rows of vines. It was a golden day, nearing its end in a warm haze which blurred the outlines of the lake at our right and the hills to our left. And through this haze I saw Theresa. She smiled, and I was aware of the warm lights in her eyes, the smooth dusk of her cheeks.

She held up a bunch of perfect grapes. "Eat them," she urged.

"Feed me." The words came with an unexpected forwardness. I had never talked like that to a girl.

She broke off a grape and pressed it against my lips. I ate them all from her hands, and her fingers were stained with the juice.

After that we walked down the fragrant aisles together, for her day's work was done. When we came to the wagon by the gate she asked if I wanted a ride; she was to drive to the packing house.

The cows were lingering in the lane, cropping the grass in the fence corners. I could keep an eye on them as we rode along, so I mounted beside Theresa. Back of us the grapes gave out a heady perfume. We said very little; but when we reached the lower gate which I had to open to turn the cows into our barnyard, I was loth to leave her.

"What are you going to do after supper?" I asked.

"Don't you like to sit in the burying ground?" she asked. "It's nice and quiet."

It was, I was aware, an invitation. I had descended from the wagon and stood in the road. The sun was dropping down toward the lake. The warm haze had been superseded by an almost unearthly clearness.

"I'll come to the burying ground," I said, "if you'll be there," and turned away with a beating heart.

I helped my father milk the cows. There were four of them. I took two and my father two. The barn was dim and sweet with the smell of hay. There was no sound but the thin streaming of the milk and the rustle of the straw as the chickens scratched in it.

My father talked little at this time. He thought of his sermon, and I thought of Theresa in that clear light with her green handkerchief, and her red lips, and the invitation in her eyes.

We carried the foaming pails to the dairy room, strained the milk, and I filled a small bowl and set it outside the door for our two barn pussy-cats. They rubbed against my legs and purred, and as I watched them lap their milk, I had a feeling of great content—as if all the world were happy and there was no wretchedness in it.

For supper we had creamed codfish with our baked potatoes. It was my favorite dish, but I did not eat heartily. My mother noticed it.

"Aren't you well?"

"Yes."

"Why don't you eat?"

"Perhaps I had too many grapes."

"Where did you get grapes?"

"I was up in the Needhams' vineyard." But I did not tell her of Theresa.

After supper my father and I washed the dishes, while my mother stirred up the buckwheat batter for breakfast. I can see my father yet—tall and thin, with his bright eyes and whimsical smile—tied up in the gingham apron which my mother always made him wear when he worked in the kitchen.

I was glad when, after we finished, my father said he must make a sick call. When he had nothing on hand, he was apt to ask me to walk with him. Hitherto it had been a great privilege, but tonight I wanted to be free.

In the little cemetery were the graves of our ancestors—three generations of Anglo-Saxons. A row of thin headstones marked the resting place of two of my grandfathers and one grandmother—one of my grandmothers was still alive; the rest lay here in state, with only the white picket fence of that small plot to separate them from the acres they had redeemed in pioneer days from forest wildness.

There were late roses blooming, and Theresa had picked one and pinned it against the green kerchief. We, the children of the people who lay there, had been taught not to pick the roses. But Theresa knew no rules. She sat on a table-like slab raised from the earth by four marble feet, with the rose at her breast, and looked at me.

"I thought you weren't coming," she said.

"What made you think that?"

"You were late."

"I came as soon as I could."

I sat down beside her. She held out her hand to me, and I took it. I thought I had never seen anything so sweet and pretty as little Italian Theresa. And so I kissed her. There was a crescent moon just above her head, which seemed to crown her.

Well, that was all there was to it. We were both very young and very innocent. My life had been lived with my father and mother and among my books. I was, too, singularly unawakened. I think

that of the two of us, Theresa knew more of life and of the making of love.

I walked part of the way home with her. When I turned back, I had again to pass the cemetery. I stopped and stood leaning on the gate, looking in. The moon was hanging just above the horizon, thin and faint in a purple sky.

I heard my father's quick step on the path. "Hello," he said. "Jerry?"

I turned and met him. For the first time in my life I found myself self-conscious with my father. I blurted out the first thing that came into my head.

"When I am dead, don't bury me in there."

I was aware of his surprise. "Why not?"

"Oh, I'd hate to think, Father, that life was just walking up and down this road, and being shut in at the end by this picket fence."

He laughed a little. "'Under the wide and starry sky dig a grave and let me lie?' Is that it, Jerry?"

"Oh, yes!" I was thrilled and eager. Stevenson was the object of my adoration in those days, and my father's understanding of my mood made me once more at ease with him. We walked along in silence, and then he said,

"Were you coming to meet me?"

I could have evaded his question. But I didn't want to. I wanted to talk about Theresa—to feel her name on my lips, to revel in a description of our innocent *amour*.

So I began, as I have said, with the interrogation, "Have you ever kissed a woman?"

I shall never forget that night, or the way my father's mind met my own. He listened without comment until I had finished. Then for the first time he spoke to me as man to man. There were things I must wait for until I was stable and steady. If I did not wait, I might miss the best. A man who was master of himself was master of the world.

I did not kiss Theresa again, or any other of the Italian girls. My father gave me books that winter in which love was exalted. I read Dante with him, and longed for a Beatrice.

2

I was sixteen when my Uncle Jerry came from Colorado. He was much older than in the picture we had of him taken during the Spanish War, but he was still remarkably good-looking. He was not married and he was forty-five. He was like my father in many ways, but I was aware as the days went on that they were different in this: Uncle Jerry lived for himself—my father lived for others. My father was handsome in spite of the plainness of his garb. Uncle Jerry was handsome plus a picturesqueness which still belonged to the people of the West in the early part of the twentieth century.

Uncle Jerry brought with him all the glamour of the wide spaces of his adopted state. He wove

about the plains and mountains the web of high romance. One found there the fountain of youth, the pleasures of Paradise. The part of the Rockies where he had his ranch was in effect the promised land!

I listened—and believed him. And then and there was born in me a desire to leave behind me the clean, bare house, the church which imposed upon my father long-tailed coats, the life which had to do with drudgery and dull dresses for my mother, dishes to be washed, cows to be milked. On Uncle Jerry's ranch other people did the work, while my uncle, in broad sombrero and other cowboy trappings, rode over his wide acres.

Uncle Jerry had, it seemed, money enough and to spare. He spent freely, wore good clothes, and seemed to me to shine with a light which had illumined Robin Hood and Alan Breck, and all those gay and gallant heroes of my story-books.

He had a worldly mind which fascinated me. His point of view was not muddled up or clouded by moral considerations. He took from life what it had to give. He did not believe himself in any sense his brother's keeper.

I think my father worried a bit about the effect on me of my uncle's paganism.

"But you're a man, Jerry," he told me; "you must learn to think for yourself."

I *did* think for myself. I saw Uncle Jerry's

faults, but I was none the less drawn to him. I grew to understand that much of his speech was extravagant, but I lent an ear to it, so that some of the pictures he painted stayed in my mind and were hard to displace even when years later I learned the facts. I aspired more than anything to be a cowboy and live in a ranch house. After a time the thing happened, and it was then that the pictures Uncle Jerry had drawn faded forever.

Of the world of women, one felt, Uncle Jerry spoke with authority. He was, as I have said, unmarried. But he talked a great deal of his conquests. His good looks drew easily the eyes of femininity. He knew this, and basked in it, and boasted of it.

"Remember this, Jerry," he would say to me. "If you want to win a woman, you must make yourself her master."

My father would never have told me that. Indeed, I doubt if he knew it. I have often wondered what my mother would have done if my father had ruled her and had refused to wear his black coat when he wanted to be comfortable, and had made her milk the cows and wash the clothes like the other women in the town.

Perhaps he might have roused in her something which she never gave him. Yet she grew in those hard years, of which I shall write later, to lean upon his tenderness; and I like to think of him, a

knight in his long black coat, rendering her the services which his great strength made possible.

Before Uncle Jerry returned to the West, he took me with him on a journey to the city of Washington.

He stayed at an old hotel on Pennsylvania Avenue, which even then was antiquated and unfashionable. But there were a few Congressmen who clung to it, and their satellites, and Uncle Jerry among them was in his glory. I knew nothing of hotels and found it all quite enchanting.

Uncle Jerry had, it seemed, a great deal to do with politics. He and the men at the hotel drank and smoked and dined together. I did not drink or smoke, but I ate the good food with a boy's appetite and listened with eagerness to the discussions. Indeed, nothing had ever interested me more than those voluble gentlemen who seemed to hold the future of the country in their hands.

We did not always eat at the hotel. There was a restaurant on the avenue where we went often for late suppers, and my memory of Uncle Jerry on these occasions is of his epicurean enjoyment of the steamed oysters which had made the old place famous. I can see him now—his red lips, his white teeth, savoring the succulence.

"Nothing like 'em," he would say, "anywhere!"

On the third day of our sojourn I was disturbed by something new in him—a change. He found excuses to be away from me; sent me to a matinee

alone; left me in the Senate gallery for hours while he met some mysterious engagement. And that night he told me with some embarrassment that he would not come back for dinner.

"You won't mind, will you?"

I didn't mind in the least. I wanted to write a long letter to my mother. I decided to take the evening for it, and found it a fascinating occupation to fill sheet after sheet of elaborately lithographed hotel paper with an account of my adventures.

When I finished, Uncle Jerry had not come. I lounged for a while in the lobby. Then I went out and walked along the lighted street. It was too late to attempt to take in a play, so I strolled up the avenue to where it turns at Fifteenth Street, and came down the south side.

It was late when I passed the restaurant where Uncle Jerry and I always went for oysters. It was cold outside (have I said that it was in February?) and I was tempted by the thought of the comfort and coziness within. I climbed a long flight of steps to the upstairs dining-room. I felt more at ease there with men and women than with the men alone at the down-stairs counter. I was given a table far back, and ordered a milk stew.

It was not until I was seated that I saw my uncle. He was at a table by a front window and was eating steamed oysters with his air of prodigious enjoy-

ment. Opposite him sat a woman. In front of her was the scarlet shell of a lobster, but she was not eating. She was talking in a vivacious manner and smiling. Uncle Jerry leaned forward and spoke to her, and his eyes had a warm eager look. I had never seen him quite like that, but I thought him very handsome and the lady pretty.

She had a great deal of blonde hair curled across her forehead, and her cheeks were very pink. Few women rouged in those days, and artificial complexions were unusual. But I did not know it was artificial, and, as I have said, I thought her pretty. Not as Theresa was pretty: she was, rather, like the girls on the billboards in front of the theatre next door. She had on a silk blouse and it was trimmed with blue. There was a blue rose in her hat, and on her hands were several flashing rings.

I ate slowly, watching Uncle Jerry and the woman. I was glad that I was half-hidden by the people at the tables in front of me, and by an overhanging palm. I had a feeling that Uncle Jerry would not care to have me see him with the little blonde woman.

3

It was while I was in Washington that a thing happened which was to color my dreams for all time to come.

Every day during our sojourn in the city we had

gone up to the Capitol. Uncle Jerry spent his time in committee rooms—"wire pulling," as he expressed it. There were certain things that he wanted done in his western country, and his vigorous personality was a great asset in pushing his claims.

I haunted the galleries, leaning over the rail and listening spellbound to the thundering of the gods. It was in those fascinating days when Theodore Roosevelt was the sturdy and idealistic president of these United States. The war between him and the legislative bodies was, in some respects, a merry one. It was, indeed, at times as good a tilt as if it had been done with lances on caparisoned steeds. There was one Senator from Missouri to whom the name of Roosevelt was a challenge for battle. He denounced in no uncertain terms the arbitrary methods of the chief executive. According to him, young Theodore was a menace to the liberties of the sovereign states. The danger of centralized government was the warning which his voice tolled.

He was a handsome man, with a crest of gray hair and a gray mustache. He wore always a frock coat and a flower in his buttonhole. The elegance of his dress and of his manner was as old-fashioned as the rather florid eloquence of his speeches. And while I resented the epithets which he hurled at my hero who sat in the White House, I was none the less aware of the charm of his elderly and picturesque enemy.

It was on the day that my dream was born that I went into the Senate lunch-room with my uncle. I remember he had ordered a great planked steak, and that my mind was on it and on nothing else! I was at the moment just plain, hungry boy—rather material, it must be confessed—wanting nothing better at the moment than the hearty food and the steaming coffee that came with it.

Yet in the twinkling of an eye I was transformed. Never again was I to be happy in the way I had been—satisfied to eat and drink and take the days as they came. Henceforth I was to be consumed by restless longings—vague aspirations. Moreover, I lost forever a certain complacency. For the first time I saw myself awkward, crude, a country boy.

The Senator from Missouri sat at a table near us. Opposite him was a girl—a girl-child indeed. She was perhaps thirteen. She wore one of the thin high-collared white blouses which were then fashionable, and a small black velvet hat with a peacock's feather caught up by a buckle. Her waved russet hair was tied at the neck with a wide black ribbon.

But it was none of these things which held me; it was, rather, an effect of poise, of fineness. She kept her eyes to herself. For all her consciousness of them, there might have been no one else in the room. She was vivid, girlish, gay—holding the old man enthralled while she talked to him, using

her hands expressively, delicately, so that I was aware of their loveliness—but always there was the effect of being a thousand miles away from the world about her.

Her detachment affected me strangely. I was used to country girls who were embarrassed or over-bold when out in company. But here was a girl who did not blush, who did not stare, who was as remote as a fairy princess in a tall tower.

My uncle saw my eyes upon her. "That's Mimi Le Brun," he said, "the Senator's grand-daughter."

"Is she French, Uncle Jerry?"

"French blood, like a lot of St. Louisans. Some Irish, too, I imagine, with that hair."

He forgot her then, as some one stopped at our table to speak to him. When at last he turned to me, he said,

"Don't you want some more steak?"

"No."

"You haven't eaten much."

"I'm not hungry."

My appetite had, indeed, left me. It seemed to me that I wanted nothing else than to feed body and soul on the beauty of that child at the other table. It was, to use an old-fashioned phrase, love at first sight—the capture of a boy's romantic fancy. Yet I knew nothing about her except that she was Mimi Le Brun, that she lived in St. Louis, and that her grandfather had a seat in the Senate.

When I got back to the hotel, I looked into every mirror I passed. I got glimpses of a tall lank youth, with a rather clumsy use of his feet, a coat that was too short in the sleeves, a rough crop of brown curls, and a somewhat wind-burned and freckled countenance.

Before this I had not thought of looks. At school the girls I knew had seemed to think me handsome enough. I was like the rest of the boys, wearing the clothes which had been bought in our little town. But now I thought a great deal about myself, and when I went down to dinner I observed with interest the young men who sat in the lobby and at the tables in the dining-room. My father had given me some money to spend, and while we ate our dessert, I asked,

"Could I buy a suit like these city fellows wear with my twenty dollars?"

He was in a good humor. "You keep your money and I'll fix you up with a good winter outfit. I have just put through a deal that ought to land me on Easy Street."

I protested that I could pay for my own things, but he was insistent. He took me on the following day to a place on the avenue and bought with a lavish hand. We were leaving town and he had the clothes sent at once to the hotel. I put them on and went to the Capitol. I hoped that I might catch a glimpse of Mimi Le Brun, and that she

might look at me and find something in me to remember, as I had found so much to remember in her. But though I patrolled the halls and the galleries for hours, I could not find her. And when I got back to the hotel and saw myself again in the mirror in my new clothes, I knew that if I had met her there would have been nothing to remember. I was not of her kind or class. I knew, too, that the best thing I could do would be to forget her. But I did not forget her—either then, or ever after.

4

My Washington experience changed me in this: that I set my Uncle Jerry's life against my father's for comparison. It seemed to me that Uncle Jerry got the most out of it. He could see the world in his own way. He was free to follow the road. My father was tied by his congregation and his conscience. I might agree that my father was the finer man, but Uncle Jerry appealed to my imagination. In my mind's eye I could see him always as I had seen him in the old hotel, with his air of prodigious enjoyment, his gay and gallant bearing. Yes, I wanted to be like Uncle Jerry while I was young. Perhaps when I was old it might be different, but age was so far away that I did not have to think about it.

I found myself restless, wanting things, impatient of my father's point of view.

"Don't you ever long to travel, Father?"

"Yes."

"Why don't you?"

"I have my work."

"I should think you would hate to be tied."

"We are all tied, Jerry."

I am sure, however, that he understood what was the matter with me, and tried to find an outlet for my energies.

We camped, I remember, for a week that summer in the woods. The days would have been dull for those accustomed to more exciting adventures, but there were pickerel and sunfish in the little lake, the water was limpid and lovely and swept by the fragrance of pond lilies, and my father in his holiday mood was very good company.

It was one night under the stars that I asked him,

"Why didn't Uncle Jerry marry?"

"He could never settle down."

"I believe I am like him, father."

"I hope not."

"Why?"

He brought his answer out after some hesitation. "He hasn't fulfilled the promise of his youth, Jerry."

"But he is rich."

"Is he? No one can be rich with a starved soul."

You see how old-fashioned we were, even then, to talk of souls. But to my father and to me souls

were as real as the stars in the heavens or the lilies in the ponds.

I was not willing to admit, however, that Uncle Jerry's lack of soul was a handicap. "He seems to get a lot out of things."

"What things?"

"Oh, well, good times and all that."

"Good times aren't everything. Being good and doing good are important. And I should hate to think you would be satisfied to look upon life as your Uncle Jerry looks on it. He is my brother, and I love him. But I don't want you to be like him.

He brought out the last sentence with the passionate force which made him such a compelling preacher. I have often thought that if he had had a church in some big community the world would have heard of him. His sincerity was absolute. He believed what he spoke. His life was narrow, but his mind roamed in broad spaces, and as for his spirit, it touched at times the far horizon.

We fell then, I remember, into a long silence. I broke it to tell him what I had never told before, of that night in Washington when Uncle Jerry had taken the little blonde woman to supper.

I think one of the great marvels of my relation to my father was that with him I had no reticences. However stern he was with himself, he was never stern with me. And he tried always to help me find the truth for myself.

He tried to help me to find it now. He made no comment except to say: "I pray that you may love and marry a good woman, Jerry. It is a great safeguard."

Suddenly into the night under the stars, and through the perfume of the pond lilies, stalked a white wraith of remembrance—of a girl with a peacock feather in her hat . . . I wanted to love and marry her. I had seen her only once, but I wanted her for love and marriage.

"A great safeguard," my father was saying. "If your Uncle Jerry had had a good wife, she might have saved him."

Yet try as I would to get my father's point of view, I could not feel that my gay and gallant uncle needed saving. I think that, subconsciously, I believed he could have his cake and eat it—that eleventh hour repentance would offset the scarlet of his sins.

I tried to say something of this. I argued there in the perfumed dark as I had heard my Uncle Jerry argue. That a man had his right to his life. That being good was, in the final analysis, monotonous.

It came to this at last from my father. "Your Uncle Jerry and I used to lie as you and I are lying here tonight under the stars, and dream of our futures. Neither of us has fulfilled them. Did I ever tell you, Jerry, that I was going to study law —maritime law? Queer ambition for a country

boy, wasn't it? But our ancestors were sea-faring folk, and the subject fascinated me. I used to read about ships, and of the strange codes which govern vessels on the seas. It wasn't easy to give it up."

"Why did you give it up?"

"God called me."

I felt something in my throat. I wanted to weep over that boy who was my father—that free-souled lad who had longed for the sea, and who had been cast high and dry by conscience on the shoals of a village pastorate.

"But couldn't you have gone on with your law even if you were converted?"

"The call was for other things. It was your mother who prayed that I might be led to preach —and I loved her."

It was hard for me to visualize my mother as moving a man romantically, as I was moved, for example, by the thought of the girl with the peacock feather. My mother was so cool and self-contained and colorless. Yet it seemed it had been her religious fervor which had swung my father from his worldly ambitions. She had prayed for him; had set before him the goal of consecration and self-sacrifice. Old-fashioned phrases! Yet you must remember that they were country folk, and that modern skepticism had not touched them. Even now I am not sure my mother was right to sway her lover from his first choice of a profession.

My father would have been himself under any circumstances—passionately idealistic, a force in the lives of those about him. Yet, right or not, I can see the fineness of it all—as I did not see it that night by the lake.

"I shall never preach, father."

"Who knows what he may do? The house of your life is your own to build, Jerry. And you've got to live in it until the end. So look out for rotten timbers."

5

It was when we returned from our trip to the lake that we found a letter from Uncle Jerry which was to change in every way my future. He wanted, he said, to send me to college. Not as my father and mother had planned, to one of the cheap small colleges where I could help by my work to pay my way, but to Yale. He would meet all expenses, giving me, besides the cost of board and tuition, a generous allowance. I was his namesake, and what he had he would leave to me. The deal which he had tried to put over in Washington had been brought successfully to a finish. It would be fine to have a Jerome Chandler to carry on the name.

It is not difficult to imagine what this meant to me—emancipation. In a moment the narrow life in the parsonage receded, and I saw myself sweeping out toward the broad seas of adventure.

I was flushed, excited. I read the letter twice aloud. "He says I am to have the ranch!"

"But not until he dies, Jerry."

That brought me up. I didn't want my uncle to die. Indeed, it seemed to me as if he ought to live forever, as if the red and white of him, his strength and vigor, gave him a sort of deathless immunity from the common lot.

"Well, of course," I stated, "I didn't mean that. But it is fine of him, isn't it?"

My father answered; "Very fine."

My mother was not so sure. "I don't know about it. Money is the root of evil."

My father laughed. "Poverty is the root of evil, too, sometimes, Eleanor."

"Well, the Bible doesn't say that."

"Aren't you glad to have me go to college, mother?"

"Yes, Jerry. But Yale, it's so far. And you've never been away from us."

I felt the grip of my father's fingers on my shoulder, and looking up into his face, I saw that he was deeply moved. I think he knew then that things would never again be with us as they had been; that when I left home the bond would be broken. And presently he said:

"I thank God that my boy is to be given the best. And I pray God that wherever he goes he may still be in our hearts."

I was thrilled by his emotion, and swayed by it. My voice broke. "There will never be anybody like you and mother—you know that!"

CHAPTER II

1

I LEARNED in those first days in New Haven that I was not like most of the other students. I had come from simple people whose social horizon was bounded on one side by the Ten Commandments and on the other by my father's black coat. At Yale many of the men I met had been prepared at private schools, and had inherited traditions of family importance. There were others, too, who were rich and without traditions. But all of them had something that I did not have—a sort of sophistication which made me feel an outsider. Their attitude toward me was, I decided, somewhat like my own attitude toward the European immigrants in our town. They went their way, and I went mine. And I was conscious always of my awkwardness, my lack of manner, the archaic quality of my ideals.

I was to know later that I had misjudged my classmates, that I might have won response had I been less self-conscious, but at the time I thought them snobs, and I kept to myself, watching them, however, with eager eyes, and wishing that I were like them.

I shall pass quickly over my first three years at

college. The history of them is not different, I fancy, from that of any boy who finds himself in an utterly new environment and has to adjust himself to it. I did some foolish things, and perhaps some wise ones. I loved books, so that in my studies I satisfied certain of my teachers, and I had great physical strength and endurance, which brought me conspicuously to the front in athletics.

Yet I had always that feeling of being an outsider until in my senior year I made a friend who changed the world for me. His name was Lionel Clark, and he lived in St. Louis. I had first been attracted to him when a theme of his was read in class. It was a short sketch of fur-trading in the early Middle West, and his pen had caught all the color and movement of the days when the Mississippi was a great highway. He wrote of trappers and priests, of Indians and of French gallants, of gay ladies transported from all the luxuries of aristocratic society to rough and primitive surroundings yet losing none of their elegance or insouciance in the process.

I walked beside him as we left the room. "That was a dandy write-up," I told him. "Is it all true?"

I had never spoken to him before. He was a dark, thin-faced lad, with a cool, bright glance and an ease of manner which marked him as one of the inner circle from which I was shut out.

But he did not shut me out. He answered with

a quick smile and a turn of his head toward me: "Of course, it is true. You Easterners seem to have an idea that all the romance of the world is in your Boston Tea Party or in Pocahontas. But we've got it out there."

"Daniel Boone?"

He shook his head. "He is spectacular, of course. But there was an early social background which was unique. My great-grandmother carried her ball gown of yellow brocade in a bandbox on my great-grandfather's first voyage up the Mississippi, and she wore it later to welcome Lafayette."

My own grandmothers had never known ball gowns. In their pioneer days they had aspired to nothing finer than a Sunday best of wool in the winter or print in summer. And I am sure that none of them had ever danced with Lafayette. My imagination was fired.

"Why don't you write a book about it?"

"That's what I want to do. I have a chapter or two on paper."

We parted after a few moments, but I was thrilled by the encounter. The fact that he was from St. Louis drew about him a magic circle. I had wanted to ask him if he knew Mimi Le Brun. I felt that even if he did not, he at least knew the places which her presence brightened. He walked on the same streets, entered the same houses.

The time came when I spoke to him again of

something he had written for the college paper. He liked my praise, and my interest, I think, flattered him. He offered to read to me the chapters of his book.

"Come over to my rooms tonight."

His rooms were charming, and I thought he must have a great deal of money. I was to learn, however, that his means were moderate. I was impressed by the fact that his belongings, while the best of their kind, gave an effect of exquisite simplicity. Nothing was cluttered up. But he had good books, deep comfortable chairs, a lamp whose base was a vase of old Chinese pottery with a shade of translucent silk showing shadowy Chinese figures. He told me later that his grandfather had furnished his rooms and had given him an allowance, and it was then I found that his grandfather was the Senator from Missouri whom I had observed so often in Washington. It is needless to say that the news thrilled me.

"Do you know Mimi Le Brun?" I demanded.

His surprise was apparent. "She is my cousin. Have you met her?"

I flushed. "I saw her once in Washington. And I heard your grandfather speak."

"He is dead, you know."

I had read that in the papers. I wanted to ask more about Mimi Le Brun, but Lionel was keen to get at his story. So I sat in one of the big chairs

and listened, much uplifted by the fact of my new acquaintance and his easy acceptance of my friendship.

There was a table well back in the corner of the room, and on this table was a photograph in a standing silver frame. I found my eyes gradually focusing upon it. It showed a girl in a dancing frock and floating ribbons. Her pose was unaffected—charming. I seemed to recognize her, and I felt the blood leap in my veins.

When Lionel finished his story, I praised it. He glowed under my praise. He was, I discovered as I knew him better, always dependent on the opinion of others. He touched the skies or descended to the depths as he was commended or criticized. In later years his clipping bureau kept him alternating between despair and ecstasy. It was, I think, because of my honest admiration of his attainments that he liked to have me near him, and I am sure I was a spur to his increased activities.

Tonight he opened his heart—told me of his ambition. His grandfather's death had left him practically without means. His father was living, but was, I gathered, a gentleman of somewhat elegant leisure. "After mother's death, everybody thought grandfather's money would come to Mimi and me. But just a year ago he married a second wife and left his fortune to her. I think he meant that she should do things for us, but she hasn't."

It was, he explained, much harder for him than for a man who had had no expectations. "We have a social position to keep up. Grandfather always made mother an allowance, and Mimi's mother—it leaves us in a deuce of a hole— That's why I want to write books. It is one way to make money, and I think I have a *flair* for it."

So he talked on, and I listened and sympathized, but all the while I was consumed with a desire to see that shadowy photograph at closer range.

"In a way," Lionel was saying, "it will be harder for Mimi than for me. She must make her debut next winter, and heaven only knows where she'll get her gowns."

I had never known girls who were presented to society. I stole another look at Mimi Le Brun in her dancing frock and floating ribbons. I felt it an incredible thing that I should be sitting here on terms of friendship with her cousin.

"That's her picture, isn't it?" I asked suddenly. I could stand it no longer. I jumped to my feet and studied the photograph.

"Yes. She's getting to be a beauty, She'll marry somebody with money, and her troubles will be over."

It seemed to me astoundingly cold-blooded to parcel her off in such material fashion.

"Do you mean that she would marry for money?"

His cool, bright eyes met mine. "Why not?"

"Well, a woman ought to love the man she marries."

"She can love a rich man, can't she?" was his somewhat cynical rejoinder. "There was Cinderella and the Prince. Most of the fairy tales are mercenary. It is rarely the poor lad who gets the girl."

I had never thought of it that way. It had always seemed that poverty must find its compensation in romantic rewards. But when I analyzed it I conceded that Lionel was right and that most nursery tales ended in a blaze of diamonds for the heroine, and trains of ermine.

The idea depressed me. "I'd hate to think that life is that way."

"What way?"

"That money meant everything."

"Money means a lot, and the sooner you believe it the better, Jerry."

It was pleasant to have him call me by my first name. I had told him that I was named for my uncle, and he had asked:

"Any French blood? We've a lot of Jeromes in our family."

I had stammered a little over the statement that we were English. As a matter of fact, if we had a family tree I did not know it. Yet I discovered afterward that our forebears were people of whom I need not be ashamed. They had not boasted of

rank or title, but they had been men of education and of ideals, and there can be nothing better.

I had told Lionel, too, that my uncle was rich and that I was his heir. I had tried to say it modestly, but I had liked the sound of it.

"I am to have his ranch in Colorado."

"You are in luck," Lionel had said; and then we had talked of other things.

I was left, however, with the feeling that I had been a bit bombastic, and after that I was careful not to speak of what I conceived to be my glittering prospects. Yet I think Lionel let it be known among his friends what the future held for me. A good many of the men asked about my uncle's ranch —it seemed to give a sort of spectacular importance to my otherwise inconspicuous personality.

It was then, I am sure, that the fiction of Uncle Jerry's ranch as a sort of shining palace took hold of my mind so strongly that it could only be shaken, in those later days of disillusionment, by the facts. I saw myself as the lord of great acres, surrounded by a retinue of dependents, in the midst of a cavalcade of galloping cowboys, lord of the manor—and, I must confess, in my wildest dreams Mimi Le Brun sat by my side.

In a way, this vision of my future gave me self-confidence, and the intimacy which grew up between Lionel and me increased my feeling of security.

My belief in Lionel's talent was, undoubtedly, the thing which tied him to me. No one else would listen as I listened. No one else believed as I believed. I gave, and he accepted. Yet I know now that I should never have given in such great measure if around him and over him and all about him had not been the glamour of his relationship to the girl whom I had set so high in my thoughts.

Our literary adventures became most exciting, for it was my adventure as well as his. My imagination often supplemented his skill, and he would stare at me and say: "Some day we'll write a play together. You have the sense of drama."

We started a play, indeed, and worked late into the night, smoking cigarettes, and putting much ink on paper. I am sure my mother would have felt that my feet were in dangerous paths had she known of the tobacco we burned, but I felt very much a man of the world in my imitation of Lionel's modes and manners.

I was adaptable, and Lionel advised me coolly, taking my need of advice for granted, and also my willingness to improve.

"You've got to learn to dance, Jerry. You tangle up your feet too much when you walk."

So I learned to dance. I learned, too, where and how to buy my clothes. I learned the catch-words and catch-phrases of Lionel's set. These were, of course, the superficial things. But I learned more

than that—that the kind of religion my father preached was unfashionable, and that high idealism was unfashionable. Lionel laughed at me for my "cold-bloodedness" where women were concerned. He could not know that it was not cold blood but dreams which kept me from the easy morals which went with the easy manners of my friend.

And ridicule did not change me. I like to think that while I was weak in many ways, I was strong in this, and that when I looked into the clear eyes of the girl in the photograph on Lionel's table, I could meet them with a straight glance.

The girl in the dancing frock with the floating ribbons was not, however, the vision that I treasured. The real Mimi was for me the girl with the russet hair, the dark-irised eyes and the burnished peacock's feather, whom I had seen in the small restaurant.

I had brought back from college that fall a bunch of peacock feathers, having begged a half-dozen dropped plumes from a neighbor of ours who kept one of the big birds. They reminded me of Mimi, and I stuck them in a vase in my room.

Lionel, observing them, said, "They bring bad luck."

I had heard this. But I did not believe it, and said so. "I like them."

"Queer thing—Mimi likes them, too. She wears their colors. She had a costume once for a fancy-

dress affair—green and blue, with a great fan of peacock's feathers—and with her copper hair it was stunning. A famous artist painted her in it; my grandfather bought the picture, and now it belongs to his wife. She won't give it up. She is acting like a pig. Grandfather intended that Mimi should have it. He told her so a thousand times, but Olga has the law on her side. She has grabbed everything, and she holds on to it."

Olga was, I learned, the step-grandmother. She was only thirty, and had, of course, married the Senator for the position he could give her.

"Would she sell the picture, do you think?"

"Not to any of us. She's not our kind, and she knows we look down on her. Her father made his money in hams and things, and she's only a second generation from social obscurity. But she's a beauty. That's what caught grandfather. And now she lives all alone, except for the servants, in her great house on Portland Place."

This was a grievance on which he always waxed eloquent, so I got him back to the picture. "Some one else might buy it for you."

It appeared, however, that there wasn't money enough for a deal of that kind. Mimi's father had, it seemed, died when she was a baby. Her mother had lived, until her father's death, on the allowance he had given her; then the thing had stopped.

"I'd hate to have the picture go out of the family.

The artist called it 'The Proud Lady.' And it isn't just Mimi to me: it typifies all the women of our family, with their high-held heads."

My heart felt like a stone in my breast. What had I to do with such women? My vague prospects for the future seemed at the moment cheap and tawdry. Mimi Le Brun knew men with millions. The old town where she lived was one in which great fortunes had been made. There was luxury and a scale of expenditure beyond my wildest dreams. Even my uncle's ranch seemed to shrink into nothingness.

Yet with youth's resiliency I built new castles. Fame would carry me far.

"Lion," I asked, "when are we to get to work on that play?"

He caught at the idea with avidity. We burned much midnight oil; we rigged up a toy theatre and used pins for actors; we fancied ourselves incipient Shaws—Pineros in the making. My spirits were at top-notch. Here was something to lay some day at the feet of Mimi Le Brun!

2

It was in mid-winter that Lionel had a letter from Mimi. They kept up a desultory correspondence, and now and then he read a line or two to me. But this letter became mine to keep. I have it now, and so can give it, word for word, as she wrote it in

her modish, angular script, on sheet after sheet of paper headed with a crest.

Lionel read it to me because I happened to be in his room when it was handed to him. "Poor old Mimi," he said, when he had finished. "She's been having it out with Olga." He laughed and leaned back in his chair. "Listen, Jerry, and see if it wouldn't make a scene in a play."

I may as well confess that I trembled as he read. It was like her own voice speaking. She wrote very naturally and unaffectedly, and she poured out her heart to him.

"You see, Lion, I had to put pride in my pocket. I am to make my debut next fall, and we have to plan ahead. Mother said that I should only be asking for what was mine, if I went to Olga. And that grandfather's heart would have been broken if he had known that I was to have my coming-out party in any other house but his.

"I don't want to have it there. The darling Papins have offered, and the Dana Clarks. But mother won't hear of it. She says she came out in the rose ballroom, and that I must. I told her if grandfather had wanted me to have things, he should have made a will and said so. And then she cried and insisted that Olga had influenced him, and that he had thought she would do everything for us.

"Well, anyhow, I went. Olga has been having

some alterations made in the house, and oh, Lion, it is dreadful. The hall looks like the entrance to the Grand Opera House in Paris—stairs sweeping up both ways, as they do on the stage, instead of the blessed old banisters that you and I used to slide down.

"She seemed glad to see me. I went in the afternoon, and she had tea for me. She has made grandfather's den over into a sort of Turkish Retreat. It is puffy with cushions of black and gold brocade, and she had on a teagown of pale blue chiffon with sleeves like wings, and she looked like a plump, blonde *prima donna*.

"I know I am prejudiced, Lion, but it was all so different in grandfather's day. She has had a balcony built at the end of the hall, and it overlooks a sort of wide foyer which leads into the ballroom, and there, as large as life and as lovely as the artist could make it, is my peacock portrait!"

Lionel laid down the letter. "I can just see Mimi on that balcony, and Olga. You can't imagine two people more unlike, Jerry."

I nodded. I was breathless with interest. The whole recital seemed like something out of a book.

"We leaned over the balcony, looking at the picture, and she said, in that slow way of hers, 'One can't give too much wall-space to the works of an artist like that.' And I said, 'Well, he had a good subject.' She stood looking at the picture, and at

last she said, 'He makes you look older and handsomer than you are, Mimi, but not vainer.'

"Can you beat that, Lion? I didn't know she had it in her. But I flung back, 'There's a difference between vanity and pride.' And she said, 'But peacocks are vain, aren't they?'

"Well, I was simply furious, and I wanted to tell her so. But I wasn't there for that, so I simply said, 'Well, I am glad he made me handsome, so that when I am old and ugly I can come back and look at it.'

"We went back then to the Turkish Retreat, and tea came, and I talked to her. I told her how mother felt, and that I knew grandfather would have wanted it, and she said, 'I think he would, and I will do everything to make it a success.' And I said, 'Thank you, Olga,' and that seemed to be the end of it.

"But when we had finished our tea, she asked, 'What are you going to do after that?' and I said, 'After what?' and she said, 'After your coming-out party?' and I said, 'Oh, I shan't have to do much entertaining; our friends will help out.' And she said 'I don't mean that. What are you going to do when you've made your debut, and had a winter of dances and parties?' and I laughed and said, 'I suppose I'll get married.'

"She sat looking at me, and do you know, Lion, she gave me a queer feeling, as if I were glass and

transparent. And somehow I felt small and mercenary, and frightfully frivolous, until I suddenly remembered that it is she who is mercenary and small-minded, and unfair to you and to mother and me, so I stood up and said stiffly, 'I am sure it would have pleased grandfather to know that I am to have the rose ballroom,' and she said, 'I am sure it would please him. But you mustn't expect too much of me, Mimi.'

"Lion, I felt utterly frozen when she said that. And I got out as quickly as I could, and cried right in the street, and had to hold up my muff so that people wouldn't see me. And when I got home, mother wasn't there. She had gone to Aunt Bernice's to play bridge. And so I am writing to you, or I shall simply expire from suppressed emotion.

"Oh, Lion, I *loved* grandfather, and it hurts and hurts and hurts, to think he could have treated me like this. I was so proud of him. And the last time we were in Washington I was so happy. Oh, I wonder if I am ever going to be happy again."

It ended there, and I was torn by her distress. To think that she suffered!

Lionel took it easily. "Oh, well, Mimi got what she wanted, so why should she care?"

But I felt that she *should* care, and, indeed, when I had time to think of it all in colder blood, I wondered that she could ever have asked a favor at the hands of such a woman. I contrasted the sturdy

pride of my own people, which would have led us to work our fingers to the bone rather than receive help from one who gave it grudgingly.

We called Olga, after that, "the Ogre." We decided to put her in our play. She was to be the villainess and was to be overthrown in the end.

"No chance of that in real life," Lionel said, "but we can do as we please on paper."

He answered the letter, and it lay for a long time in a basket on his table. At last I carried it off. It was such a treasure, with its thin, crested paper and its cry for happiness! I knew that Lionel would not miss it, and that if he did he would think it lost. I should not confess my theft to him.

3

It was in June of that year that the miracle happened. I call it a miracle because it seemed nothing less than that to me. I was invited to spend a month with Lionel Clark at his step-grandmother's camp in the Maine woods.

"Mimi will be there, and her cousin Bernice," Lionel told me. "Olga says in her letter that I may ask any fellow who will fit in, and it seems to me it will be a great chance for us to finish the play."

At first glance, his reason for asking me might have seemed selfish, but I am sure it was more than the play which made him want me above all

others. Our intimacy of the winter had knit us more closely together than either of us realized at the time, although we were to know it in the years to come. In spite of our utter differences in training, we were alike in this, that we soared to the skies when the mood was on us. We touched the stars! There was no limit to our aspirations.

I accepted the invitation with avidity. I could not, however, understand Lionel's willingness, and Mimi's, to be under such obligations. I hinted as much one night to Lionel.

"It seems to me I'd rather starve—"

He shrugged his shoulders. "After all, in a sense it is ours, and we've always been to grandfather's camp in summer."

Mimi wrote that Olga had been "rather decent."

"She has bought me a lot of new clothes, and she is entertaining a large party of my friends and yours, Lionel. Mother won't go. She says it would remind her too much of the old days. So she and Aunt Bernice will stay with the Barrys at their place on Lake Michigan."

Aunt Bernice was, I learned, a sister of Mimi's father. Her husband was a doctor of excellent standing, and it was her daughter, Bernice Barry, who was to go with Mimi to the camp in Maine.

I wrote to my father that I would not come home in July, but would be with them in August. I had spent all of my summers hitherto at the parsonage,

and I felt I had earned a change of scene. Yet my mother was not well, and I was sorry to be away from her. She had been failing for several years and had lost her old energy of body and of spirit. She leaned on my father. He did much of the housework, even cooking a meal now and then, and when I was there I helped him. The previous summer there had been, too, a strong young woman, Rose Drury, who came in when a feminine hand was needed for such work as canning fruit or getting up special meals for visiting clergy. Rose was buxom and red-cheeked, and in contrast my mother's paleness and frailty had been appallingly apparent.

I wrote that I wanted them to have Rose regularly, and I would pay her wages. I had saved something from my allowance, and there had been an extra gift of money from Uncle Jerry.

In all my years at college, I had not seen Uncle Jerry. I wrote to him regularly, and now and then he replied. He spoke of me always quite grandiloquently as his heir, and his letters had always that dashing effect which was so much a part of his personality.

He was never, it seemed, long in one spot. His letters came to me from Texas and Arizona, from Alaska and the South Sea Islands. I wondered why he did not stay on his ranch, yet envied him his opportunity for travel.

My father was, I think, sorry I did not come straight home. He wrote that he hoped I would not prolong my stay in Maine. My mother was yearning to see me. Her disappointment was keen.

I would have given up much for both of them, but I could not give up this chance of meeting Mimi. But I insisted they must have Rose Drury, and I sent them a check.

As the time approached for our journey, I was tense with excitement. I was afraid, yet not afraid, to meet Mimi. I was afraid because I was sure I could never measure up in any way to the men among whom she moved. I was not afraid because I felt that Fate could not be so cruel as to separate our futures.

Lionel advised me as to the things I should need: a belted jacket and knickerbockers for everyday wear, and white flannels for evening. It was not, Lionel said, the custom to dress in camp, but there might be motor rides which would take us into more formal atmospheres.

Automobiles had come by this time into rather common use among people of means; but I had no friends who owned them, and in the country horses were still the main dependence of the farmer. My father would not, indeed, have exchanged his old mare for anything run by gasoline.

My idea of a camp was, I must confess, based somewhat on my own experience in the camps where

my father and I had fished and hunted. Remembering the poetry of those nights under the stars, beside the perfume-swept pool, it seemed to me that my meeting with Mimi Le Brun could have no more perfect setting.

I was not prepared, therefore, for the luxury of the place to which we came after a thirty-mile motor ride from the train. The house was low and long, built of logs with the bark on, and back of it stretched primeval forests of pine and tamarack, of spruce and fir, fringed at the edge of the cleared spaces with a lighter growth of white birches, juniper, and oak.

Stately, mysterious, the great evergreens reached toward the sky. And in that enchanted forest I was to walk with Mimi, talk with her. I was overwhelmed by the thought of it.

When we arrived, rather late in the afternoon, at the great log house, there was no one in sight on the porches. We entered and found a blazing fire, for in spite of the sunshine the day was cool. In front of the fire, in a big chair over which was thrown a black bearskin, sat a woman, stiff-corseted and imposing. Her blonde hair was swept up into a curled pompadour. Her cheeks were pink, and her rose and white beauty seemed to stand out from the shadows as if painted on canvas.

It was not until Lionel spoke, however, that I realized this was Olga, the Ogre who had stolen his

inheritance and the inheritance of Mimi Le Brun.

Olga welcomed me graciously, giving me her hand when I was presented, and telling the man who had brought in our bags to serve us some refreshment.

"The girls hoped to be here when you came," she said, "but a party rode over from the Stanleys' camp and insisted that they should go fishing. Mimi left word for you, Lionel, that you were to ride over to the lake and meet them."

"Are they on horseback?"

"Yes. Drake can tell you the road they took."

We went to our rooms and got into riding clothes. The house was lovely, spreading out so that all the rooms were on one floor. The furnishings were in keeping with the wildness of the surroundings, but pre-eminently comfortable. In the great living-room where Olga had sat, the heads of animals decorated the walls—moose and deer and elk—and the mantel was made of a huge log split lengthwise and supported by rough-hewn blocks of granite.

The bedrooms were bright with Indian rugs and Indian blankets, and sweet with the fragrance of bay and cedar. There was a bath with its water piped down from the lake. I felt my pulses pounding. It seemed to me that at any moment the masquerade might end and I should find myself back in the parsonage, milking the cow or washing dishes for my mother.

Yet I was uplifted and eager in anticipation of my meeting with Mimi, and I chatted quite freely and confidently with Olga when we went back to the living-room to have tea and sandwiches in front of the roaring fire.

Our hostess talked to us of our trip. I knew at once that she was not at ease with Lionel, and his manner to her held a touch of half-insolence which I resented. He was a guest in her house, and it seemed to me he should have remembered it.

When we had finished our repast we mounted our horses and started out to meet the others. Lionel knew the way, and our horses took the road at a good pace. We came to the lake to find a dozen people gathered in gay canoes and on a low, long pier which ran out into the lake. They shouted when they saw us, and one of the girls detached herself from the rest and ran to meet us.

She had a scarlet handkerchief bound about her head so that I could not see her hair, but I felt that it must be Mimi, and I was assailed by a sort of dizziness.

Then I heard Lionel saying, "Bernice! Bless your heart, old girl, but I'm glad to see you!"

As she came up to him, he lifted her to his saddle-bow and kissed her. She was a little thing, with dark flashing eyes and an oval, olive-tinted face.

"This is Jerome Chandler," Lionel said, "familiarly known as Jerry."

She swung herself up to my saddle-bow as she had swung herself up to Lionel's. "Shall I kiss him, too?" she asked, and I was aware of the invitation of her lips and eyes, as years ago I had been aware of it in the lips and eyes of Theresa.

Well, I accepted the challenge. No man could, I am sure, have done differently without creating an awkward situation. Yet I hated it, although I carried it off as easily as any. But I had come, a knight riding to his lady, and I felt that this dark sprite had stolen something which I had treasured for another.

"Where's Mimi?" Lionel demanded.

"She went on ahead to meet you."

"We must have missed her."

"Oh, well, we are all going back in a minute," Bernice said. "We caught loads of fish, and we are dying for our dinner."

"Olga gave us something to eat when we arrived," Lionel told her. "She's a great old bird, isn't she—dressed up to the nines in a place like this!"

"She isn't bad," Bernice stated. "She was never chaperoned, and so she gives us a loose rein. We break all the rules, and we've had some high jinks."

I don't know what I had expected of Lionel's friends, but I am perfectly sure that I had not expected this—a daring siren who asked for kisses, and a crowd who broke the rules.

Some of the others came up just then, and Lionel

and I dismounted. I was presented to everybody, and they seemed to talk all at once. I smiled and said little. There was, indeed, little to say. They talked a language which was unknown to me. I should, I think, have felt crude, uncomfortable, in the midst of them, if my mind had not flown beyond them to my meeting with Mimi. She filled my thoughts to the exclusion of self-consciousness, so that I looked on with a feeling of detachment at the picturesque group gathered by the lake, as if I were audience and they the colorful chorus of some comic opera.

As we rode back Bernice was beside me. "Why didn't Lionel tell me you were so good-looking?"

"Perhaps he wanted to keep it as a surprise."

She flashed her dark eyes at me. "He should have given us warning."

We laughed together, and I began to feel at ease with her.

"Lionel says you are from New York. I adore it! When I die, it will be my heaven."

"I am not from New York City; my home is in the western part of the state."

"Oh, really?" She swept on from that to, "Lionel says you are writing a play."

"*He* is writing it."

"He says that he turns all of the love scenes over to you."

"Well, he does."

"Have you had so much practise in real life?'

"I haven't had any."

"You needn't tell me that!" Her slanting glance was provocative.

I was repelled by her manner, yet I was not a prig nor a prude: I was merely a romantic boy, holding fast to my worship of one woman. I was, too, impatient. I wanted to spur my horse on and on until I found her whom I sought. She belonged to this world of golden shadows and of waving branches. I felt she must be different from all the rest; that if she were like Bernice, I should die.

Presently Lionel rode back to talk to Bernice, and I gradually dropped behind. I did not want to mingle with that comic opera crowd. From the viewpoint of today my youthful arrogance is astounding. They were not so shallow as they seemed, nor was I, indeed, so serious.

I turned my horse to the right and was presently riding under the great trees, parallel to the road but away from it. Here was no sunlight, but rather a faint greenish illumination shading off into a sheen of amethyst where a pool lay quiet among the deeper shadows, unearthly as a mirage, shining as a steel blade.

To my exalted state of mind the forest seemed a place of real enchantment. I should not have been startled if before me had arisen some dryad whom I might pursue, faunlike, through the dim aisles.

My horse, walking on pine needles, made no sound. No bird-note broke the stillness. From far off came the dull beat of hoofs as our party galloped gayly towards home. There was, too, the faint echo of laughing voices. And then, at last, as I loitered —silence.

And something in that silence and loveliness seemed to beat against my heart so that I was half suffocated by it, and I found myself all at once worshiping beauty as my father had worshiped. I stopped my horse and bared my head, and I seemed to hear my father saying, "God made it!"

Though I did not know it then, that moment was the last in which I looked out upon the world with a boy's enraptured gaze. A turn of the road, as one might say, brought me to man's estate. I have often wondered how my life would have tended if the message had come to me that morning which arrived ten days later and took me back to the farm.

CHAPTER III

1

My horse and I came at last to an open space which was clear of trees. As we approached it, my eye was caught by something which lay directly in our path. It was a woman's hat, a little Alpine-peaked thing of soft green felt, and stuck in the side, so that it slanted above the crown and caught the light in a gleam of iridescence, was a peacock's feather!

Cinderella's Prince was no surer that the glass slipper belonged to the maiden he sought than was I that the hat with the shining feather belonged to Mimi Le Brun. I felt she must be near, yet though my eyes swept the open space and the shaded depths beyond, I could see no sign of her. I picked up the hat and had it in my hand when a man appeared suddenly at my right, rounding a great tamarack tree which had hidden him. He was on foot, was very tall, very dark, and wore riding clothes of irreproachable style and finish. He frowned when he saw me standing with the hat in my hand.

"Give it to me," he said. "Miss Le Brun lost it."

I did not like his manner, but I handed him the

hat, saying: "I am Jerry Chandler, Lionel Clark's guest. The rest of the party have ridden on."

He did not acknowledge my introduction of myself by giving me his own name. "We heard them go," he said, and his words confirmed my belief that Mimi was not far away.

I felt, however, that the presence of the dark man struck a jarring note in my romantic symphony. I would go away at once and leave her to him.

But he surprised me by handing the hat back to me. "You might as well take it to her," he said, "and I'll catch up with the rest."

He had hardly finished his sentence when he strode on to where his horse was hitched, and presently I heard the pounding of departing hoofs.

In a whirl of conflicting emotions I dismounted and went toward the place where the man had emerged. At first I saw no one; then suddenly I was aware of a bright banner flaming against the naked whiteness of a group of birches. I had to look twice, however, to discover that the bright banner was a woman's hair. Her riding clothes were of a rough gray cloth that melted into the background. She was leaning against one of the trees, and her back was toward me.

She was taller than when I had seen her last, but her hair was tied with a black ribbon, just as it had been tied when as a child she had lunched with her grandfather in the Senate restaurant.

A twig snapped under my feet, and without turning she said, "I told you not to come back, Andy."

"It is not—Andy."

She flung herself around and looked at me, and it was then I saw she had been crying.

"Who are you?" she demanded.

"Jerry Chandler."

"Lionel's friend?"

"Yes. I found your hat, and the man who came out of the woods said you were here."

"Andy Fuller—" She hesitated, but confessed the truth. "We were having a peach of a quarrel. I told him to go away and not to come back."

I just stood looking at her. It seemed to me incredible that I had met her at last, lovelier than in all my dreams of her, in spite of the tears which stained her cheeks.

"I always cry when I am angry," she said. "It is a silly thing to do, but Andy made me furious. And I told him what I thought of him. I think he was afraid to come back."

"I am sure he must have been," I told her; "he looked it."

She sat down on a log and took her hat from me. "So you are Jerry," she said. "Lion has told me a lot about you. How did you happen to come through here? Where's Lion?"

"He went on with the others. But this was all so wonderful that I wanted to be alone with it."

She looked at me. "Yes," she said, "it is wonderful. You've never been here before?"

I smiled down at her. "I've never been anywhere."

I surprised her, I think, by my honest confession. I surprised, indeed, myself.

"How interesting to know that you have it all before you!"

"Well, it is." I sat down on the other end of the log. I was afraid to breathe lest I spoil the enchantment of the moment. It was almost impossible to believe that she was really there, so delicate, so fine.

"This isn't the first time I have seen you," I went on. "You were in the Senate Restaurant years ago, with your grandfather, and my uncle and I were eating lunch near you."

"How did you know who I was?"

"I asked my uncle, and he said you were Mimi Le Brun."

Her dark-irised eyes were shadowed. "It was the last time I had grandfather all to myself. The next year he married Olga."

She seemed to float away from me on a sea of memory. I brought her back.

"You had a peacock's feather in your hat then. Do you always wear them?"

"Oh—yes." She stood up. "We must be going, or we shall be late for dinner." She lifted her face

to me. "When I get back to the camp, will everybody know I have been crying?"

I had to admit, "They might."

"I'll wet my handkerchief in the pool and freshen up a bit."

"Let me wet mine."

I brought it back to her, and she had me hold a little mirror which she fished out of her pocket. She had, too, an infinitesimal powder-puff, and she touched her cheeks with it, and her nose and chin. Her own skin was rose-leaf, and she did not need any artificial aids, yet I must confess that the faint perfume of the powder, and her face so close to mine as I held the mirror, set my pulses pounding. She put on her hat, and we went together to where her horse was tied to a tree.

"What did you think," she asked, as we rode along, "when you found my hat?"

"I wondered how it came there. I thought there might have been an accident."

"There wasn't," dryly. "I threw it at Andy."

She made no further explanation, and there was silence for several moments, while I was consumed with curiosity as to what the dark man could have done that she should throw her hat at him.

She spoke again, after a while, of her grandfather. "Did you hear any of his speeches?"

"Yes."

"Wasn't he wonderful?"

"Yes. I used to hang over the gallery rail to listen."

"I must have been there sometimes when you were, hanging over the gallery rail. How queer to think that we were both there! Lionel has told you about Olga. It was dreadful for all of us. She is pretty, isn't she? And old men are vain. She flattered him."

The note of sophistication in all that she said hurt me. "Perhaps he really loved her."

There was a flash of jealousy. "But he loved us —he loved me; yet he forgot us at the last."

"I am sure he did not forget you," I said earnestly; "he *couldn't* have forgotten."

"But there was the will," sharply, "leaving her everything, and leaving us out." Her breath was coming quickly. "It wasn't just the money—although that meant a great deal to us. It was the forgetfulness that hurt."

Yet I think that my defense of her grandfather pleased her and formed a link between us, and that she was kinder to me because of it.

For she was not kind to everybody. I was to find that out as I knew her better. She could wrap herself in her little mantle of remoteness and thus withdraw from those who disturbed her or whom she disliked. She had this manner, to some extent, with Olga. It was the one flaw I found in her

—that she could accept favors and yet seem to scorn them.

2

When we reached the house, there was nobody about. Mimi left me, and I went to my room, where Lionel was getting into white flannels. "We are all going over to the Bradleys for a dance," he told me, "so you'll have to change."

"Where were you?" he asked presently. "When I looked around, you were out of sight."

"I rode through the woods. I met your cousin."

"Andy Fuller said you were with her. What happened to Andy? He was terribly grouchy."

"I think he and Miss Le Brun had quarreled."

"They are always quarreling. And don't call her 'Miss Le Brun'; everything here is first names. It's a rule of the camp."

When I came back from my bath, I asked, "Who is Andy Fuller?"

"You wouldn't have to ask that if you lived in St. Louis. His father and his grandfather were at the head of a great coffee house. Money to burn! He wants to marry Mimi—and he'll get her before he is through with it."

My heart seemed to stop beating. "Is she in love with him?"

"No; but the chances are she'll marry him. He isn't used to having people say 'no' to him, and he is

very masterful. A man like that usually gets what he wants in the end."

Across the years came the echo of Uncle Jerry's voice, *"If you want to win a woman, make yourself her master."* It had come to me then as a rather attractive theory; it was hateful to me now.

"She seems very young," I said, "to think of marrying."

"Well, she is. But even after her debut she's not likely to find any one with more money than Andy."

I wanted to flare into a denunciation of his worldliness. I wanted to tell him that a girl like Mimi Le Brun, a little lovely thing like Mimi, would not give herself to any man until she found her mate; that she would not give herself to any man who failed to climb with her to the heights; that she was too young now to know what love really meant. But when she was taught—

I had the sense, however, to hold my tongue. Lionel would laugh at my rhapsodies. He wouldn't understand, and he would find out how I felt about Mimi. I couldn't risk that. No one must find out: it was too sacred.

When we were dressed, we went into the great living-room where most of Olga's guests were assembled. I saw Andy Fuller, towering above the other men. I was glad he did not tower above me. I could match his inches with my own, and I had more than his breadth of shoulder. I had, too

enough boyish vanity to believe that I could match him in looks. Lionel had slapped me on the shoulder as we left our rooms, saying:

"You're stunning in those clothes, Jerry. Don't let anybody put things over on you."

I knew what he meant. I had confessed to him a certain shyness I had felt in accepting Olga's invitation. "I'm not like your friends, Lion."

"You don't have to be," he told me. "Just keep a stiff upper lip and don't let them see that you feel the difference."

Yet I did feel the difference, none the less, and stood a little on the outside of the group of young people, seeing Bernice in the midst of them looking like a bit of flame in her amber satin gown as the light of the fire shone on her.

Mimi was not there when I first came in, but presently I saw her approaching through the door of the living-room which led to what Lionel called "the harem." Olga had given the men one wing of the house and the women the other. Her own suite separated the two. I was surprised that there were no older people to keep the Ogre company. I was to learn the reason later.

Mimi in the doorway was not the Mimi of the afternoon. She seemed to have grown up in a moment. She wore a trailing dress of a deep shimmering blue, and on a thin chain around her neck was a pendant—an old French jewel set with

emeralds and sapphires and opals. She told me afterward that this pendant was the last thing her grandfather had given her. It was now her only ornament. Her burnished hair was dressed high on her head, and this, too, gave her a grown-up air.

From the moment of her entrance she was the center of things. I did not see her speak to Andy Fuller, but he stood beside her with an air of ownership which I resented furiously.

I was, as it were, on the fringes of the crowd, but at last Mimi saw me and nodded. I did not join her. In her princess-like presence I was gripped by self consciousness. I felt that I must not presume on her friendliness of the afternoon. I wished desperately that some one would come and talk to me, so that Mimi would not see me standing there alone.

It was Olga who took me finally under her wing. She approached me in her slow way, waving a great feather fan. She was very gorgeous in spangled silver and, I must admit, very beautiful.

"You won't mind," she said, "if I put you next to me at dinner? The last arrival always gets the seat of honor. But I know you men would rather be between two pretty girls."

"I wouldn't," I said honestly.

I think she liked that, and we laughed together.

"You don't know any of them very well, do you?" she asked.

"No one but Lionel."

"Well, it is always hard to get started in a crowd like this. I still feel that I am not acquainted. They have all been coming every year, but this is my first summer. And I invited this particular crowd because of Lionel and Mimi. I wanted them to have a good time. I might have asked some of my own friends, but they wouldn't—fit in." She hesitated. "My friends are different."

I knew what she meant. Her beauty would carry her far with men. It had carried her on to marriage with a distinguished gentleman. But it would not carry her far socially with women. Her money would be more potent there. I think that her real reason for inviting the young crowd was that she could get on with them better than with their elders, and she felt that friendship with them might be an entering wedge.

Bernice was on the other side of me at dinner. Mimi was across the table, with Andy Fuller next to her. As the meal progressed I saw them talking earnestly.

Bernice saw them, too. "He is apologizing to Mimi," she said, "he is always doing it."

"And—does she forgive him?"

Bernice shrugged her slender shoulders. It was a gesture I had noted among the girls of the crowd. It was, indeed, a subtle reminder of their French ancestry—that, and the darkness of their eyes.

But Mimi's beauty was quite gloriously Irish, by

way of, I found, her maternal great-grandmother. Her cheeks at that moment were flaming, and under the lights her hair flamed.

"Do you wonder that Andy is crazy about her?" Bernice was saying in my ear.

I did not wonder that anybody was crazy about her. I wished that Bernice would not talk to me. I wanted just to sit and feast my eyes on Mimi.

Then Lionel's voice broke in. "They are asking me to read our play, Jerry. And I read like a fish; so I've told them you'll do it."

It seemed to me that a perfect battery of eyes were turned on me, but I managed to say, "We can't read the whole of it; it isn't finished."

"I know, but we've got the outline, and the big third act is all written. We can try it on these helpless infants when we come home from the Bradleys'. If they don't like it, they can go to bed."

3

There were ten guests besides Lionel and me. With our hostess, we made thirteen at the table.

Bernice was much disturbed. "Something will happen to some of us, you see if it doesn't! And it will probably be Mimi. She can't miss it, with her peacock feathers and thirteen at table. She laughs at me when I say such things, but look at the awful luck she's had with her grandfather dying—and all that."

She caught herself up as Olga turned a little toward us, and changed the ending of her speech skilfully.

"Well, thank Heaven, there won't be thirteen of us in the cars. Andy Fuller will drive six, and Drake four, and the rest will go in Scott Selden's car. I am going with Scott. Far be it from me to ride behind Andy when he's got Mimi on the front seat!"

Remembering the episode of the afternoon, it seemed to me surprising that Mimi should ride with Andy. But she did, wrapped in a wonderful cloak with a fur collar which came up to her eyebrows.

It was just as she was stepping into the car that she turned and saw me.

"Aren't you going to ride with us?" she asked. "We've plenty of room for him, haven't we, Andy?"

Andy nodded, and before I knew it I was sitting on one of the small folding seats in Andy's seven-passenger car, with two pretty girls—the Ammidon twins—in the tonneau, and a stocky little youth, Girard Sylvester, on the other small seat.

I was just behind Mimi, so near that by leaning forward a little in the dark I could touch my cheek to the fur of her collar. I could hear her low laugh —the things she said to Andy.

"I haven't forgiven you, Andy," floated back to

me, "but I'd rather have you drive me than Drake or Scott Selden."

"Thank you. Bernice says she wouldn't trust me when I've got you beside me."

"I would trust you, always—as a driver."

I felt that I ought not listen, that I ought to talk to the Ammidon twins. But they seemed absorbed in the little Sylvester chap. So once more Mimi's words floated back.

"I *do* like you, Andy. And the things you do for me are—wonderful. But I won't stand being bossed. I never have been. I never will be."

"That's why I—love you."

Again, in desperation, I turned to the twins and spoke of the beauty of the moon.

But they cared nothing about the moon. Sylvester had left his seat and was sitting between them, and they were apparently entranced by some story he was telling. They lent unwilling ears to my remarks, so I gave up in despair.

Mimi was saying, "But when you do things as you did this afternoon—trying to make love to me, when you *know* how I hate it.'

The world was, all at once, flooded with light. So this was why she had thrown her hat at him—why she had cried.

"If you loved me," Andy expostulated.

"But I *don't*. How many times must I tell you? Why can't we be just friends?"

"Because I want more than that." His voice was tense. "And I am going to have it, Mimi. You can't get away from me. You are—mine."

I was listening now with all my ears. I wanted to know what Mimi would say to this autocrat who claimed her. I played eavesdropper unashamed.

For a long time she said nothing, and Andy drove as if a thousand devils were pursuing. I began to realize what Bernice had meant. Yet always, in spite of his wild speed, he seemed to have the car under control.

Then Mimi said, "That isn't the way to make me care—to act like a Turk and a tyrant."

"Do you want to care, Mimi?"

"Oh, well, perhaps. Everybody says it would be the ideal thing."

I sat back in my seat, sick at heart. Oh, that hard little voice! It seemed to me it could not belong to the girl with whom I had talked in the afternoon —to the woman of whom I had dreamed.

4

The Bradleys' house was more like a country club than a private residence. It was part of a fashionable summer colony, and was furnished with a sumptuousness that seemed out of place in the heart of those wild mountains. Yet it was lovely, none the less—a sort of fairyland—and my heart quickened to the beat of the music.

Lionel danced first with Olga, then turned her over to me. I'll confess that I felt sorry for her. She was ill at ease and showed it. I was ill at ease, but I did not show it. I was sure of that, for Lionel said afterward,

"You might have been born to the purple, Jerry."

But I was not born to the purple. I had been born in a parsonage, and the thing had left its marks upon me. I had not inherited, as those other young people had inherited, a tradition of gayety. It was not until I danced with Mimi that all the stars sang. I knew then that I had never been young, that I had never been happy, that never before had I drunk of the wine of life so that it was warm in my veins, making me mad with the joy of it.

Then and there was born in me a fierce determination to win her. I did not know how I was going to do it. Without her my life would be wasted, my ambitions would go down in a crash. I would wander on, aimless, in an empty world!

I am sure that Mimi did not have the least idea of my state of mind. She treated me in a comradely fashion, as she had treated me in the wood. She gave me three dances before the evening was over, cutting out one of Andy Fuller's to do it, and I could see that he was seething.

I did not go back in Andy's car. Olga asked me to ride with her. She thought, I am sure, that she

was being kind to me, and that I felt as alien as she among those merrymakers. She could not know I was at last recklessly one of them; that the Puritan in me had succumbed to the Pagan; that I meant to grasp at happiness, at whatever sacrifice of previous scruples. I wanted to drink life from a brimming cup.

I am afraid I was not very good company. My thoughts were with Mimi on that front seat with Andy Fuller, and I wondered what he was saying.

When at last we reached the camp, it was after two o'clock. I had expected, of course, that we would go at once to bed, but I did not know the nocturnal habits of Olga's guests.

"We can sleep in the morning," Lionel told me, "and they want the play, Jerry."

I found that "they" meant, specifically, Katherine Merrill and Stiles Sanderson. They represented, it seemed, the literary element in Lionel's list of acquaintances. Stiles had written some verse which had been published in magazines of the better class. Katherine had tried to write, and, having failed to do anything significant, she had won a reputation for brilliancy by her ruthless criticism of the work of others.

The Ammidon twins and Girard Sylvester decided not to sit up. They had made plans for an early morning fishing trip, and included in their plans were two house guests whom I have not

mentioned—Jimmie Hancock and Luther Dean. They made no apologies for their desertion. Anne Ammidon was dead for sleep and confessed it without shame.

"Run along, Baby," Lionel told her; "you are too young for such late hours—and, anyhow, Jerry's play might go to your head."

"It isn't *my* play," I objected.

"All the love scenes are yours," he said. "You wouldn't let me touch them."

Katherine Merrill looked at me. "You don't mean that you are as old-fashioned as that?"

"As what?"

"As to attempt the romantic."

"I haven't attempted it; I have achieved it," I said lightly.

She did not know whether or not I was in earnest, nor did the rest of them, and I felt I had scored a point by my daring.

It was, as I have said, the day in which we worshiped at the shrines of Shaw and Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones. But Lionel and I had followed no model. We had flown high, and perhaps too high. We had taken the story of a man who, seeing the hope of his country in a return to democracy, applies it to his own life and becomes, as his grandfather was before him, a cobbler. By day he mends shoes, and at night he lives among his books and studies the stars. There comes to his little shop

a summer visitor—a girl who wants her slippers mended. She is the ward of a rich aunt and has been brought up in luxury and idleness. The cobbler falls in love with her, and the dramatic action is based on his fight to bring the girl to his own democratic point of view and to save her from a richer suitor.

The whole thing was, as I have intimated, crude —the effort of two boys who knew nothing of the stage. But there was imagination in it, and now and then it struck twelve. I had written the speech in the third act where the cobbler made his plea with the girl for a simpler life, and I had written with a pen of fire.

It needed, however, more than a fast-driven pen to make the situation plausible. It needed, indeed, genius. Yet the work was strong in some parts. I have the old play now: I wish I had the boy's fine fervor, as he dashed off the lines!

My audience grouped itself about the hearth in a half-circle. Mimi was in Olga's high-backed chair with the bearskin a background for her beauty. Andy lay on the rug at her feet. Thus enthroned among the shadows—for there were only the candles and the light of the fire—Mimi took on a mysterious aspect. She seemed less a girl, more of a goddess.

Olga had chosen a deep chair a little removed from the others. I think she slept while I read. I am sure she was not in the least interested.

Standing on the hearth-rug, with a tall candle set on the mantel to light my manuscript, I began to read. Now and then, when a sentence was obscure, I lifted the candle. I was perfectly conscious of the picturesqueness of my pose. I was conscious, too, of my skill as a reader. I had inherited my father's gifts of a good voice and an impassioned manner. I felt that when Mimi heard that speech in the third act she would see me with new eyes. And the others would see me.

I knew the speech almost by heart, and when I came to it, I gave it with all the power and passion in me. I was aware that Stiles Sanderson's gray eyes were shining, behind his glasses; that Katherine Merrill was poised like a hawk ready to pounce. Andy Fuller did not look at me; he lay motionless on the rug at Mimi's feet. Bernice and Lionel sat side by side on an oak settle, and her hand was in his. And Mimi, still as a statue, her lips parted, leaned forward with intent face—listening.

When I finished, there was applause, and Stiles Sanderson said,

"It is very well done."

"How are you going to end it?" Bernice asked.

"Oh, of course the cobbler will get the girl," Katherine Merrill said, in her clear, high voice. "People must have a happy ending."

And then Mimi flung out: "Oh, I don't *want* him to get her. It sounds all right in a play, but

do you think a girl would be happy without any of the luxuries she loves? What could he give her—that would make up for them?"

And I flung back at her: "The question is, what could she give him? Love doesn't ask—it gives!"

Andy Fuller sat up. "I agree with Mimi. Your man is a cad; and he is asking everything—"

We faced each other—two tall, young cockerels. "Real life isn't like that," Andy went on. "Even if she had married him, do you think she would have loved him when she had to wash his dishes and cook his food? The thing is preposterous!"

For the first time, hearing it set forth in his scornful voice, it seemed preposterous to me.

"I told Jerry it wasn't real life," Lionel said, "but it seems to me pretty fine."

Stiles Sanderson agreed with him heartily. "It is fine. And what, after all, is real life?"

"Oh, things that really happen, Stiles," said Katherine. "You know that."

"Things can happen to our souls as well as to our bodies," Stiles said. "It seems to me that Chandler has stripped his man and woman of all that is tawdry. He has found the truth."

They discussed it hotly after that, but I took no part in it. I was feeling a reaction from my high moment. The cobbler's plea had fallen on dull ears. Mimi had not been touched by it. She had ranged

herself on the other side of the argument, and Andy was her advocate. They stood, as it were, together.

Stiles was insisting: "Chandler has done a big thing: you'll all see it some day. The world needs more poets. It is the dreams of poets which are, after all, the prophecies."

I saw Mimi glance at me and look away again. And her voice came with an edge of weariness. "I wonder if the rest of you are as tired as I am."

Olga's voice, heavy with sleep, said, "Do you know what time it is?"

"I know I'm starved," Lionel said.

"Well, there's everything in the refrigerator," Olga told him, "and I'll make some coffee."

We adjourned to the kitchen, and I helped Olga make the coffee. Mimi, with her train always in the way, cut bread for toast, Andy broiled the bacon, Bernice scrambled eggs, and the rest of the crowd set the table. It seemed all very fantastic to me.

I was not hungry, and when they trooped into the dining-room I did not follow them. I went out of doors where the wind blew chill. Light was creeping through the forests, but so faint was it that the trees seemed spectral, unsubstantial. I walked under them. I did not know where I was going. I only knew that my mind was in a turmoil; that the events of the day had crowded in upon me until I was tense with conflicting emotions.

Then through the silence of the woods a voice called, "Jerry."

I turned and saw Mimi coming toward me. Suddenly the ghostly forest seemed to enfold us. Only with an effort could I keep myself from holding out my arms to her, so confident did I feel that I had drawn her to me.

"Jerry," she said breathlessly, as she came up, "what made you run away from the others?"

"What made *you?*"

"I don't know." She was gazing at me in a half-dazed fashion. "I—looked for you, and you weren't there—and I came to find you."

"And now that you have found me—what?"

"I want you to go back with me—it is freezing out here, and everybody is drinking coffee—" She stopped, then went on hurriedly: "But I didn't come to say that. I—loved your play, Jerry." She was close to me and laid her hand on my arm.

I laid my own hand over it. "Yet you laughed at it."

"No! But it was so true that I hated it . . . Love might be like that, Jerry, if there were any men in the world like your cobbler."

I stood looking down at her. "There might be a man."

"No, *no!* Oh. what do you know about men? And you ought not to write of the kind who don't exist. You'll make women think that some day

they may meet them, and the kind they meet are—Andy Fullers!"

She flung his name at me with scorn. I was surprised at her frankness. Yet I will say this, that then and ever after she was frank with me.

"Why not let the Andy Fullers go?"

"Oh, Andy is the apple on the tree in this Garden of Eden. He's always tempting me. I adore the things he does for me, and I should miss them dreadfully if he didn't do them."

"Would you miss—him?"

"I don't know, Jerry. I am afraid I should."

We stood there in the spectral forest, staring at each other.

At last Mimi said: "Oh, let's go in. They'll be looking for us."

They were looking for her—or, at least, Andy Fuller was. He came upon us suddenly, and when he saw her with her hand on my arm, anger leaped into his eyes. But his voice was unruffled.

"I thought you were lost, Mimi."

"No. I came out to tell Jerry that I liked his play." It was her defiance, flung in answer to that look in his eyes.

Again the flame leaped up, but he still kept his voice to that unruffled note. "Well, why didn't you tell him in a warmer place? You'd better get back to the fire. And everybody is going to bed."

"Oh, why go to bed," she demanded, "when the

day is just beginning? I could stay out here forever."

The dawn had come upon us, flooding the forest with rose light, and in the midst of that effulgence, Mimi, with her burnished hair and shimmering gown, seemed a figure of almost unearthly beauty.

And now Andy turned to me: "I should think you might have known, Chandler," he said with a touch of insolence, "that it is too cold for her here."

Before I could answer, Mimi interposed. "Jerry had nothing to do with it. I came because I wanted to come. I shall go in when I want to go."

I expected to see the flame burst into a conflagration, but I was disappointed. Quite unexpectedly Andy laughed. "I adore you when you are angry, Mimi. But I am not going to have you die on our hands with pneumonia. If you don't come in, I'll carry you."

She protested, "Andy!" But I saw, with a sinking heart, that she was not offended, and there was the faint echo in my ears of Uncle Jerry's advice, *"Make yourself her master."*

Mimi walked back to the house beside Andy, and I followed. The rose had faded from the sky, and the world was gray.

5

From that time on, Andy Fuller was my enemy. He had, of course, no definite cause for grievance,

but he was conscious, I think, of some subtle influence which I came to exert over Mimi. And I, too, was conscious of it. It was marvelous that it should be so. But she was always kinder to me than to any of the others. She gave to me what seemed to me an adequate explanation:

"I am always having to oppose my will to Andy. You are as restful as a calm after a storm."

She liked to be with me, and we often walked and rode together. I told her something of my life in the parsonage. yet I am sure she never saw it as bare as it was in reality, nor ourselves so poor. My fancy painted it, as it painted all things, with a full brush.

It was at this time that I began to build the gigantic structure of self-deception which was to work such havoc in my life. I saw Mimi's future and mine in a glamorous haze, in which we lived on Uncle Jerry's ranch as in some ancient feudal castle. That Uncle Jerry must die before my dreams could come true did not weigh upon me. The ranch was, in effect, mine. I saw Mimi as the chatelaine. with a retinue of servants. I saw her at one end of a festive board, dispensing hospitality. I saw her in the saddle, riding with me across the saffron mesas and up the purple hills. I saw her in a high-backed chair like Olga's, with its black bearskin, listening while I read the plays which would make me famous.

It was this dream which gave me confidence. I came to my love not as a poor parson's son, but as the heir of Uncle Jerry. I might, I argued, be dealing in futures—and in very indefinite futures—but we were both young. We could wait. All the great lovers of history had been constant; all the great heroines—Heloise, and Juliet, and Francesca.

Oh, the dreams of a boy! And of such a boy! I could weep as I remember him!

Lionel and I worked in the mornings on our play, and I worked sometimes late into the night. I counted every moment lost that was not spent with Mimi or at my desk.

The play came at last to be *my* play. Lionel neglected it more and more in his very active pursuit of Bernice—or, perhaps, it might be put, in her pursuit of him. Anyhow, the wooing became fast and furious, and on the tenth day after my arrival the engagement was announced.

Olga gave a party in honor of it. The Bradleys were invited, and other people from the summer colony. It was a dinner-party, with the rugs up afterward in the living-room for dancing.

Andy Fuller ordered from Tiffany's a present for Bernice. It came one morning when we were having our midday breakfast. It was a golden bottle for scent, set with pearls and hung on a gold chain.

Bernice was in raptures, and Andy was the hero of the moment. And now with Bernice's gift from

Tiffany's came a brooch for Mimi—a tiny jeweled peacock in a circle of diamonds. I do not know when he gave it to her, but she wore it for the first time the night of the dinner-party, and for the first time I saw her in white—a sheer lace dancing-frock —with Andy's pin the only spot of color.

Everybody exclaimed over the pin.

"Of course, he shouldn't have done it," Mimi explained calmly, "but he says that it is an advance bridesmaid's present; that there is no reason why the bride should have everything.

I am sure they all felt she was going to marry him, and that the pin was the sign and the seal of their understanding with each other. But my heart was like lead. Either way, the thing seemed unspeakable—if she married him, or if, with no expectation of marrying him, she would accept such a gift from him!

It was when the evening was half over that I had a dance with her. All the windows were open wide, and the moonlight streaming in seemed to dim the candles.

"I have never seen such a moon," I said, as I guided her among the whirling couples; "the night is wonderful!"

She looked up at me. "Let's go out in it, Jerry." Her voice was so low that I had to lean down to catch her words. "I—I want to talk to you. I *must* talk to you."

With burning cheek and beating heart I followed her, catching up her cloak which lay on a chair.

We made our way across the road and entered the forest. The carpet of pine needles was like a clean floor for Mimi's silver slippers. The air was so still that we seemed to float in a golden sea.

"I told you," I said, "that it was wonderful."

"Oh," Mimi said, "is anything wonderful?" She spoke hurriedly, sharply. I was aware of her agitation.

"What is it?" I asked. "What has happened?"

"Jerry," she said, and flung out her hands in a little gesture of despair, "I have promised to marry Andy. And I don't know why I did it."

I stared at her, unbelieving. "No," I said, "no! You *couldn't* do such a thing. You don't love him."

"I love what he does for me," she said. "And today, when he gave me the brooch, I—I wanted it. Does that sound silly, Jerry? But I *did.* And I knew if I accepted it that it would tie me to him. Yet—I took it."

I did a thing then that I wondered afterward I had dared to do. I bent over and took the brooch from her dress. She struggled, but I held her while I unfastened it.

"Jerry!" she said; "Jerry!"

But I had it in my hand. "You are going to give it back to him. Oh, do you think I shall let you sell yourself for a thing like that?"

"Give it to me," she said in a strange little voice.

I put both of my hands on her shoulders. "I will not—until you promise. I shall keep it—and you can go back; and if he asks for it—you can tell him that he can come—and get it!"

I was absolutely reckless. It seemed to me at the moment that if Andy would come and ask for the brooch we could settle the thing there, as men had settled such affairs since they first fought for a woman.

My father would never have done it as I did. But my Uncle Jerry would have done it. My defiance is a debt I owe to Uncle Jerry. For I am sure that it saved her—the recklessness of it, and the feeling that I meant what I said.

"But if I give it back," she temporized, "won't there be a next time—and a next? I told you Andy was the apple on the tree, Jerry. And he's always hanging there, waiting to be picked."

The words seem light, as I write them, but she was in dead earnest, and I heard myself saying, as if some one else were speaking: "There will not be a next time. Oh, Mimi, Mimi, if you would only let me show you what love can be!"

Her lips were parted. "What can it be, Jerry?"

I told her in a rush of eloquence. How we would go together to that far country; of the shining palace in which she should rule; of the dawns that

would come up over the purple hills; of the nights under the stars.

Well, I have said I was a poet. And I was carried on by my imagination, beyond myself, beyond realities, into that land of fancy in which I had lived since a child.

And when I finished I had her in my arms, under the moon, and she was saying: "Oh, would it be like that, Jerry?"

And I was saying: "It would be more than that. I have no words to tell you all that it would be."

6

She made me no promise, except that she would give the brooch back to Andy. "I don't know what I shall say to him—but I'll do it."

She could not, she told me, when the first flush of exaltation had passed, think of marrying me. "We can't live on dreams, Jerry."

"I'll make them come true," I assured her, stoutly.

The next morning Andy Fuller did not appear at breakfast—nor Mimi. I learned that she had a headache, and sent her a scribbled note. She wrote back:

"I gave the brooch to him, and he is simply *wild.* I am keeping out of his way till he gets over it."

As I could not see her, I mounted my horse and rode through the wood. When I reached the place

where I had found her hat, I dismounted and went toward the clump of white birches where I had first seen her. I sat on the log where we had sat together.

Not far away was the quiet pool with its amethystine shadows. Now and then a bird came down to drink, but there were few birds in the dark forest, and for the most part not a sound broke the stillness.

Then all at once I heard the brittle crackle of the needles under foot. I looked and saw a tall figure on the other side of the pool.

It was Andy Fuller! He did not see me, for I was hidden by the thick growth of birches. His face was dark, and he seemed as he stood there to cast a sinister shadow among those deeper shadows.

He had something in his hand which sparkled, and he was looking down at it. Suddenly he lifted his arm and flung the shining thing into the pool. I guessed then what I learned afterward was the truth—that it was the peacock brooch which disappeared with a gleam and a ripple into the watery depths. It is probably there now—to the wonderment of all the little fishes!

I went back and found Mimi by the fire, and everybody else down for the late lunch. The mail had come, and a telegram. The telegram was from my father. My mother was, he said, very ill. They wanted me at once.

CHAPTER IV

1

I CAME into my father's house as a stranger. I can not express the feeling which it gave me of utter separation from all that had made up the years I had spent there.

The house seemed diminutive, the trees dwarfed: nothing was as it used to be, except the lake and the high arches of the sky.

My mother lay in bed, a waxen figure with silver hair. Yet the rooms were peopled for me by slender, energetic ghosts of her, restless, busy, worrying over my little lies, tying my father up in gingham aprons.

But now she was not restless or busy. No matter how much she might wish to follow the old paths, her feet could no longer tread them. She was often in great pain, and hour after hour my father would sit beside her bed, holding her hand, and sometimes when I passed the door I would see him on his knees beside her.

I knew then how life had knit them together. In earlier years their dreams may have differed, but in their long sharing of a common lot they had grown close in spirit, and I realized that to my father my mother had become once again the girl

who had led him into high paths of duty for his soul's sake.

Outside my mother's room the whole house bore the stamp of Rose Drury's occupation. Her personality pervaded everything. The bare beauty of shining cleanliness was no longer apparent, although it was clean enough: it was only that it was not so shining nor so orderly. Yet there was a certain color and glow which the place had lacked in my mother's time—Rose's pink sweater on a chair, the bright pink of the gingham dresses which she wore, wools out of which she was knitting another sweater heaped high in a basket, a bunch of pink roses crushed into a bowl on the center of the table.

The meals which she put on the table were most generous and, I may as well admit, more tempting than my mother had ever served. Our menus had been in a sense ascetic: we had always had enough to eat, but no time or money had been wasted on our appetites. Rose gave us great dishes of meat in their own rich gravies. She baked cakes for us—black with chocolate, or white with cocoanut. And she ate them herself, sitting at the end of the table in her pink dress and with her pink cheeks matching the roses of the bowl.

Because death stalked under that roof, I swung back once more to the things I had forgotten. Forced to face a future without my mother, I asked myself again questions about eternity. When the breath

left that frail body, would the spirit live on and on, as my father believed?

Yet I did not want to think of death. I wanted to drink of life—to share with Mimi youth and joy, all vividness of experience. I felt that every moment away from her was a lost moment; that even now she might be drifting toward some destiny which would shut me out. I wrote her long letters of eloquence and entreaty. If she would only—wait.

Her notes in reply were brief. She had nothing to promise. And gradually I lost the assurance which had come to me in that one moment of her surrender. I grew depressed, wishing to escape from among the shadows into some space illumined by hope and happiness.

Every day my mother was growing weaker. When the pain was not too great, she liked to have me sit beside her and talk to her of my future.

"What are you going to do with your life, Jerry?"

"I should like to write, mother."

She pondered that. "What kind of writing?"

"Books."

What I really wanted was to write plays. But I should never have dreamed of telling her. Nor that an almost finished manuscript of one was at that moment in my desk upstairs. To my mother the theatre was a place of evil influences. She would have been shocked and startled to know of my ambitions. So I did not tell her.

Her bright, pain-filled eyes were upon me. "I wish you might have preached like your father."

"I shall never be as good as my father."

"You mustn't say that. He was a boy like you when I met him, not yet having found the world's need of him. I felt that he could do bigger things —and he has done them. I hope that you may meet a woman some day, Jerry, who will bring the wish for bigger things into your life."

I had met the woman. But I kept that to myself. The big things to which I aspired would have seemed small in my mother's eyes. To write a play? To marry Mimi? To be lord of my own wide acres? She would have blown all these ambitions away with a puff of her breath. To know the Lord and serve him. All else counted as nothing in the sum of her hopes for me.

So it was, as always, to my father rather than to my mother that I poured out my heart. I told him first of the manuscript in my desk.

"I'd like to read it to you. I didn't do it alone; Lionel Clark and I are collaborating."

"Bring it down."

I was glad to do it, and I read it to him as we sat under a big maple tree in the front of the house. The sun was setting as I finished, and as I looked up, I saw that my father's gaze was on the luminous sky where two golden clouds floated in an almost breathless clearness.

"There's talent there. And your theme is big. Fix your eyes on the stars, Jerry. You can't go far wrong if you do that."

Yet I knew that he had fixed his eyes on the stars, and to what had it brought him? Poverty—this bare parsonage—a lonely old age when my mother left him. Never would I set my feet in such a path —never, never, never!

2

It was on the day before my mother died that I told my father about Mimi. Confession was easy. I was consumed with a desire to speak her name to some one. I wanted to dwell on her beauty, her remoteness from the rest of the world, her graciousness to me. I was bursting with big thoughts—dreams—hopes—and these things cried for utterance.

We were in the church when I talked to him. It was Saturday night, and we had brought flowers from our garden for the vase by the pulpit. This had always been my mother's office, and she had worried lest it should not be done. My father had not let her illness interfere with his preaching. Heavy-hearted though he was, he still spoke to his people and found refreshment, I think, in doing it.

When the flowers were arranged finally in the big vase, I came down to where he stood waiting for me in the dim aisle.

"I want to tell you something," I said. "Do you

remember, years ago, you said that some day I should find the woman who would hold my soul in her hand? Well, I've found her!"

He did not seem surprised. He stood there beside me, tall and stiff in his black coat. "I thought it might be so, Jerry. You are much changed."

"How am I changed?"

"You live in a world of your own. Your body is here, but your thoughts are far away."

He was smiling at me, and I knew him for the same man to whom I had poured out my soul as a boy—that whatever might be stiff and formal in his outer aspect, there was softness within and sympathy.

I described Mimi, sitting down in one of the pews to do it, and he sat beside me and listened. When I was through, he said,

"She doesn't love you?"

"She says she doesn't know. She's very proud. And they've always had money. And her family is very distinguished."

"And she wants these things in you?"

"Yes. But—I tell her that some day I'll make a name for myself—and that she won't be ashamed of me."

"Love is never ashamed, Jerry."

"But she has a right to expect that I shall give her something in exchange for all she would give me."

"If you give her youth, hope, aspiration, she can give you no more than that."

"I know—" I was eager, assured, "and some day she is going to give it."

"How can you know that?"

"Life couldn't be so cruel as to take her away from me!"

"Life is often what we call—cruel—" I saw him clench his hand as it lay on the back of the pew.

"But—we have to bear it, and find the good in it."

"I couldn't bear it if I lost Mimi."

"You would have to bear it, as I have to bear—losing your mother."

It was the first time he had spoken of it. There was a break in his voice—an agony—

I laid my hand on his. Yet even in the face of what he was feeling, I would not admit that losing my mother could mean to him what it would mean to me to lose Mimi.

"Mother loves you—you *know* she is yours throughout eternity—but if I lost Mimi, I should go alone through all the ages."

Oh, it was utterly high-flown, but I was much in earnest. And he knew it and put aside his own sorrow to help me.

"Perhaps it would be best for you to meet the situation strongly and put her out of your life now."

"Oh, *no*," my voice was sharp with the fear of it. "Why should you say that?"

"Because you have nothing to offer her, and she wants things offered."

"I—I have my ambitions, Father—and some day I shall have Uncle Jerry's ranch."

His sad, steady eyes met mine. "You are counting on that?"

"Why not?"

"You won't have it until he dies, Jerry. And there is nothing more stultifying than waiting for dead men's shoes."

"But I am not waiting. I—I am going to work and achieve—and make her love me—and nothing else will matter."

He stood up and laid his hand on my shoulder. "No, nothing else will matter. And when it comes to marriage, it is best to say 'hands off' to everybody but the two people concerned. I might tell you that Mimi is neither of your kind nor class—and that there's danger in that. I might point out that she is utterly unfit to be the wife of a poor man such as you must be in all probability for some years to come. I might say that you are on the wrong track when you build your future on so frail a structure as writing a play and inheriting a ranch. Yet what do I know of the fires you two may kindle? Or to what heights your love may sweep you? So it is in the hands of God. I can only ask that He will give you the best—and make you worthy of it!"

It seemed to me that he had never been so fine

as when he put behind him all the prejudices which might have ruled him at this moment and thought only of how he might meet me on some high ground of mutual understanding.

"Only remember this," he said after a moment, "that there must always be truth between you. Never anything less."

I assented eagerly. It seems to me astounding that I should not then have grasped the fact that my imagination was already weaving a web of falsehood which was to enmesh both Mimi and myself. So real to me was the future which I had painted that night under the moon.

3

It was on Sunday at dawn that my mother died. I was not with her, and my father came to my room in the gray of the morn and laid his hand on mine.

I opened my eyes, startled, and when I saw his face, I knew what had happened.

"She just fell asleep," he said.

He walked to the window and looked out. The world was very still—with now and then the sweet clear note of some waking bird. "Love doesn't die, Jerry," he said. "Thank God for that."

I went and stood beside him. "It was wonderful that you could have all these years together."

"Yes," he said, "it is wonderful."

I think that in both of our minds death gave back

to my mother some of the aspect of romance which she had lost in those busy years. I know that my own vision pictured her as she must have seemed to my father on her wedding day. I saw, too, in their faithfulness the faithfulness which might be mine and Mimi's. The love-affair of my father and mother gained in depth and significance because of my own.

That day my father did not occupy the pulpit. He stayed in his study or in my mother's room, pacing restlessly between them. The rest of the house was taken over by the women of the congregation, who helped Rose Drury set everything in order, and who brought over cooked food of every kind that we might have enough for any arriving guests.

I, too, stayed in my room as much as possible. I had been in to see my mother, and had found that my father had placed in her hands a bunch of pansies which had bloomed in her own garden. She looked very pretty and young, in spite of her silver hair, and I was glad to leave her there, serene and waxen, and to go back to my room and pour out my heart to Mimi. I wrote in a perfect luxury of sorrow, embroidering elaborately the theme of my parents' constancy and devotion. It seemed to me that she must be touched by it and that her pity would be akin to some warmer and deeper emotion.

The funeral was to be on Tuesday. We had sent word to my father's mother, whose home was in an

adjoining town. She was very frail and was unable to come. She lived with an unmarried daughter, my Aunt Mary, who was also kept away by the need of my grandmother for her. Rose Drury became therefore, in effect, the mistress of the house. And I must say that she carried off the honors well. She clothed herself in a black dress which toned down her pink-and-whiteness, and which gave her an air of real refinement. She marshaled the forces of women, and under her direction they made sandwiches and brewed coffee and cut cakes for the crowds who would come from a distance and who would partake of our hospitality after the sad ceremony.

So we left my mother in the little burying ground where I had years ago sat with Theresa, and my father and I came home alone.

I stayed on then for some weeks. I could not leave my father when he needed me so much. We had not talked over any plans. I simply drifted; writing to Lionel, writing now and then to Mimi; eager to get back to them both, but held to my father's side by my sense of his dependence upon me.

Finally one night he said, "We must talk about your future, Jerry."

I told him that I had no plans.

"But, of course, you won't stay. I don't expect it. And I have been thinking that it might be well

to have my mother live with me, and my sister. Mother will not be with us long, and then Mary and I can go on together. And the home will be here when you want to come, Jerry, and always our warm welcome.

"You must have a wider life than mine, Jerry," he said later. "I have no regrets. My life was, it seemed, planned for me, and I have lived out the plan. But for you there will be something perhaps more vivid, more adventuring. I should like to think it. But you must never let it separate us. I want to feel always that our souls are knit together."

I can never give to you, as I saw it, the beauty of his worn face—the strength of his belief in the rightness of it all. With, it seemed to me, nothing left, he was leaning on faith, as he had leaned in the old days when we had walked and talked together.

I told him that I should like to go West. That I should like to live in the same town with Lionel and work out our dreams together. That I wanted to be near Mimi. "Uncle Jerry says he will keep up my allowance. And very soon I ought to be earning something."

"Don't depend too much on your Uncle Jerry."

"I shan't when I once get started."

He was silent for a time, and then he said, "I sometimes wish that Jerry had not come into your life."

I was indignant. "Why should you say that, Father?"

"I am afraid you may have been weakened by an expectation which may not be justified. Jerry spends as he goes. There may not be much left."

I was cold with apprehension. "But there would always be the ranch."

"Unless some misfortune comes to him. Perhaps you and I build too much on futures, Jerry. I have given you the inheritance of a dreamer. It might have been better if you had had more of your mother's practical nature. But then we are what we are, I fancy. Only you must put foundations under your dreams, Jerry."

I felt that I was putting them. Lionel on his way down from Maine was to stop in New York and see a play-broker. The play wasn't finished—but it wouldn't hurt, Lionel said, to feel around a bit, and have a peep at prospective markets. And I had fancied that in Mimi's note of sympathy there had been a hint of warmth which might be made to burst into a flame.

What more encouragement did I need than this —that my friend and the woman I loved had a welcome for me? These were the firm foundations of my structure of dreams.

I told my father good-bye at the door of the parsonage. My grandmother and my Aunt Mary were already settled comfortably under his roof. My

Aunt Mary was to occupy my room, and my grandmother the guest chamber. My father kept the room in which my mother had died as his own. My grandmother's taste was like my mother's. Life was for them, I should say, neutral-tinted. Yet in their own way they got a good deal out of it.

I was glad to find, however, that Aunt Mary was different. She wrapped herself now and then as she went about the farm in a great red cape, as colorful as the flame of an autumn tree.

"Mother hates it," she confessed to me, "and I never wear it away from home."

"It is very becoming."

"Well, it warms my spirit as well as my body. When I get to Heaven I am going to have red wings, Jerry."

We laughed together. "You are like Father," I told her.

"Yes. But Eleanor always held him down, and mother holds me. My red cape is my declaration of independence. I always put it on when I want to show mother that I own my soul. There are days when I feel as if I should like to wear it to church."

"Why don't you? Father would love it. It would be to him like a column of fire in the wilderness."

"I could never face Mother afterward. No, I shall have to look forward to my red wings, Jerry."

I was glad that my father was to have Aunt Mary. Somehow I felt that her spirit would light the bare,

clean house, as her cape would have lighted the church. And that my father's life would be brightened by the glow of her fine humanity.

When I left him, standing alone on the little porch, where my mother had stood so often beside him, I wished, just for the moment, that the old days might come back, when my father had made my world; yet they would never come back. I was being swept on by forces so strong that I could not stem the tide. The world which my father had made for me was to live only in my memory of those high moments which we had spent together.

BOOK TWO
MIMI

CHAPTER V

1

So I entered the big city on the Mississippi—a boy seeking his fortune! Not as in the old days with a bundle tied on a stick and a shilling in my pocket, but coming none the less to my adventure with high hopes and an eager sense of worlds to conquer.

I had taken a room in a family hotel well out in the west end, where Lionel lived with his father. The price had seemed to me prohibitive; but Lionel had insisted that I must be near him. When the play was accepted, he assured me, there would be money enough and to spare.

My training in thrift had made me unwilling to spend unless I knew how I was to meet expenses. I was aware that I need expect no increase in my allowance from Uncle Jerry. His letters had of late lacked the easy optimism of earlier days. Cattle-raising, he said, was not all that it used to be. The ranges were more and more restricted as the land was taken up. His income was, for the moment, much reduced.

Yet even with this he spoke of investments which promised big returns, so that any fears I might have had for my future were dispelled. Nothing

could shake my confidence in Uncle Jerry's financial stability as the owner of vast acres. I could not think of him as anything less than as a landed proprietor with wealth flowing towards him on a golden tide.

I felt, however, that this was the moment for the grand gesture. The doors of a new life were opening to me. I must not close them by an exaggerated parsimony. For a few weeks at least I would eat and drink and be merry with the rest of them. Tomorrow must take care of itself.

Lionel met me at the train, and we took a taxi to the hotel. He was overflowing with enthusiasm. The play was the thing! He had had talks with agents, managers, actors. I realized, even as he told me, that none of them had made definite offers. They would be glad to read the play and that was all.

"But if they read it and don't like it," I demanded, "What then?"

"They will like it. Stiles Sanderson says that third act of yours will carry it."

I was not so sanguine. I was, indeed, a better critic of my own work than Lionel. I knew that the play had merits but I knew, too, that it lacked sustained power. But I was glad to be deceived into believing that Lionel was right, and that we were on our way to fame and fortune.

I was, indeed, ready to believe anything on that

gay morning as I rode through the streets of the town which harbored Mimi.

It was early in September, and the languorous warmth of the summer season lingered; the women on the streets still wore their thin dresses, and the leaves which had fallen were a pale yellow, so that they lay drifted across the sidewalks like faint sunshine.

Lionel had made many engagements for me. We were to dine that night with Olga. "She asked all the crowd that we met at the camp. You are very popular with the Ogre, Jerry. She told Mimi that you were the only one who treated her as a human being and not as a stuffed doll to stick pins in! Not bad, was it? I didn't think she had it in her." He laughed lightly. Neither then or ever after would he give Olga her due as a rather fine and intelligent creature. She had stolen his money. He could see no virtue in a thief.

"We go to Bernice's this afternoon for tea. Mimi will be there, and Stiles and Katherine and a lot of the others. They are all crazy about you, Jerry. Bernice says it is because you are as remote as one of the old knights in medieval legends. She insists that you ought to wear silver armor."

"What nonsense!" yet I liked it!

Lionel surveyed me with a meditative eye. "I'm not sure that it's nonsense. You are a sort of reincarnation, Jerry. You have the spirit of another

age. It isn't outside of you, it is inside. I fancy it's the result of the way you were brought up."

"I don't see that I am so different from the rest of you."

"Well, you are. Sanderson says it is genius. He told me flatly that I didn't have half your gift of writing—that I am a farthing dip to your torch. But I am not willing to admit it."

Was it any wonder that all this went to my head? That I was drunk with it? Swayed from my normal balance?

Our spirits were at top-notch. The whole world seemed to glow and sparkle as we whirled up at last to the hotel.

As soon as I was alone in my room, I called up Mimi. A woman's voice answered—a charming voice, but not Mimi's.

I asked for Miss Le Brun.

"She is not at home. Is there any message?"

"Will you tell her that Jerry Chandler called?"

Did I fancy it, or did a breath of coolness deaden the warmth of that charming voice? "I will tell her."

The hours that followed seemed to me empty, although Lionel took me to his father's club for lunch. It was an uptown club, and at this hour most of the men whom we saw were a leisurely group who had either inherited fortunes or had made them, and whose days were spent in killing time.

They seemed creatures of another sphere from that in which dwelt my father and Uncle Jerry. They were well-groomed; middle-aged, most of them, but wearing their years jauntily: witty, travelled. Yet I was to find them a bit stagnant when I knew them better—for they touched only the nearest seas of the shores of life, and never sailed it!

But I was sailing it—with a fair wind and spread canvas— towards Mimi! My impatience to see her was almost unbearable.

After our luncheon Lionel and I motored through the Park. Ascending by a long circling approach a hill crowned with a stately building, we came at last upon a statue which overlooked the city.

And such a statue! Other centers of population may proclaim in marble the achievements of their patriots and statesmen and the glories of the past! It remains for St. Louis to set on her highest hill the figure of a saint!

Never anywhere else had I seen a thing so symbolic. Never anywhere the glorious reach of imagination which placed above the smoke and clamor, above the busy streets, the skyscrapers, the clanging trolleys—this knight in armor—leading men onward and upward beyond the strife and the struggle.

I was thrilled by it—and by the sweep from east to west of that midwestern metropolis where once had been the stockade of a trading post.

"I knew you'd like it," Lionel said, "I wanted you to have it on your first day."

It was there we met, my friend and I—in that lift of our hearts toward all that was beautiful.

Coming down, we passed a lake with swans on it, crossed a bridge, and took a shaded road overhung by great trees. And under the trees, riding slowly and deep in conversation, were two people on horseback. The man was tall and the girl's hair under her stiff hat blazed in the sun.

"It is Fuller and Mimi," Lionel said, and stopped the car as we reached them.

Mimi turned in her saddle and saw me, and a light leaped up in her eyes. I needed nothing more than that. Even Fuller's half-insolent greeting, "So you've turned up again, Chandler?" could not rob me of the rapture of the moment.

It was perhaps to punish his insolence that Mimi said, "I want to talk to you, Jerry. Andy, will you take my horse back to the stable? I'll ride in Lionel's car to Bernice's and meet you there."

Fuller laughed, and it was not a pleasant laugh. "Do you think I am going to let you desert me like that?"

"I am not deserting you. But I haven't seen Jerry for weeks."

Yet I could see that she hesitated, and her next words were a compromise. "I'll ride back with you, and Lionel can pick up both of us at the stables."

He agreed to that, and she waved her hand to me and was off. And then Lionel said, "She doesn't dare push Andy too far."

"What could he do if she did?"

"Heaven knows! Lock her up in a tower," he laughed. "She's afraid of him."

"Why should she be? We don't live in the dark ages."

"Well, she can't afford to lose him. Yet I don't believe she's the least bit in love with him."

I hated that. It seemed to smirch Mimi with a kind of worldliness which soiled the whiteness of my dreams of her. Lionel's words cast a shadow across the bright beauty of the day. Yet when at last we came upon her waiting, I forgot everything in the joy of the moment.

"I called you up," I told her, under cover of the noise of Lionel's quick chatter as he talked to the somewhat sullen Andy.

"I thought you might. Did Mother answer?"

"Some one answered who had a charming voice."

"Mother is charming. But I might as well tell you now, Jerry. She is your bitter enemy."

"My enemy?" incredulously.

She nodded. "Oh, Andy has stuffed her with a lot of things. That you are dangerous to my peace of mind and to his, and that you may interfere with all the well-laid plans for my future. He has Mother on his side absolutely."

The thing loomed as a tragedy. "Do you mean that the latchstring won't be out?"

"Oh, no. I made a bargain with Mother. I told her I wouldn't go anywhere with Andy unless I could entertain you in my own house. And you are to come Sunday night for supper. The crowd will be there. I always have informal things. Our apartment isn't big enough for anything else—and big things cost a lot—"

I hardly heard her. My mind was on her mother. "I am not sure that I care to go where I am not wanted."

"If I want you, isn't that enough?" She was very lovely as she leaned towards me.

"More than enough, my dear."

"Oh, Jerry, you mustn't call me that. You mustn't count on anything—? I'm a will-o'-the-wisp. I never know my own mind—" quick tears came to her eyes.

"I'll make you know it, Mimi."

At that moment, I could have died for her. I had no fears. The tears in her eyes were enough for me.

2

Bernice's home was charming. There were old portraits, French furniture in gilt and faded rose, pale carpets, long mirrors. Bernice's mother in faint

blue was a part of the picture. She was the first of those vivacious, youthful-looking mothers of whom I was soon to see so many. Her hair was touched with gray, but was waved and puffed into an elaborate coiffure. She poured the tea and made me sit beside her. She had very clear, dark eyes, and I felt that they weighed me; that she knew I did not belong to that drawing-room with its old portraits and French furniture. So clairvoyant did she seem, that I was gripped by the fear that she might see as in a crystal ball the background of my boyhood's days, that bare simple parsonage.

Neither then nor ever after was I at my ease with her. And I do not think she tried to set me at my ease. She was one of the women to whom the fact that her grandmothers had brought their ball-gowns from the old world was a matter of immense importance. She felt separated by impregnable barriers from all those whose grandmothers had not worn ballgowns!

The tea-table was set with heavy old silver on a silver tray—and there were all sorts of delicious things to eat—muffins, and tiny sandwiches, and fragile French cakes. It was a new function to me. Tea in our town had been the evening meal—the hearty supper. At college I had been invited to few houses. It was to me a rare and exciting experience to be one of this gay and sparkling group.

So it was with something of a shock that I heard Stiles Sanderson say when I drifted over to him a little later. "You should never have come here, Jerry."

"Why not?"

"Oh, we shall spoil you. This isn't your atmosphere. You got your gifts in less complicated surroundings. Instead of sending you to the city the gods should have transported you to the top of a high mountain. You might have given a song to the world. But they'll stop your singing."

Katherine Merrill was listening. "Why don't you talk plain English, Stiles? What he means, Jerry," she explained, patiently, "is that with us you'll gambol on the green. It is much better than piping alone on the top of a mountain."

"Is it?" Stiles demanded. "I wonder if Jerry will find it so?"

Bernice came over just then, and took me away, so I left them to argue it out alone. But years later when the conversation recurred to me, I knew that while in some ways Stiles was right, I was glad that the gods had taken me to the city.

Bernice carried me off to a little card-room beyond the drawing-room. "I simply must talk to you, Jerry," she said, and I saw with surprise that she looked anxious, worried.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Lionel." She paused and plunged in. "I simply must talk to somebody about him. And you are to be with him all this winter. Jerry, is the play going to be a success? Is it?"

I hardly knew how to answer her. "I hope it may."

"Oh, it's got to be. Lionel is depending so much on it. He is spending more money than he should. And Father has heard of it, and he's furious. He told me last night that if Lionel didn't pull up, he wouldn't let me marry him."

The vision of the clear-eyed figure in faint blue made me ask, "What does your mother say?"

"She agrees with father. She adores Lion's family, and she isn't hard on his sins. But his grandfather's death made a great difference. Dad's not willing to give us a large enough allowance to live on. He says that Lion must dig in and do something for himself."

"Have you talked to Lion?"

"Yes. But—you know him, Jerry. He'll never see danger ahead until he's hurt. He doesn't realize that if Father won't give us an allowance, we can't marry."

"Why can't you?"

The bright color swept her cheeks and throat. "Because—oh, I love him enough, Jerry, to marry him. But he can't take care of a wife—without outside help. His tastes are too extravagant."

I saw then for the first time the womanliness of her. A womanliness which had been covered by a crust of artificiality. She loved Lionel with a deeper, more self-sacrificing devotion than he gave her, and she knew it. It was not an easy thing for her pride to know.

"I thought—Jerry, if you could help . . . about the play. Keep him at it. He's playing cards—too. And he loses . . . and he isn't like himself . . ."

I cannot tell you how touched I was by her revelation to me of her deeper nature. We talked it over with the almost pathetic seriousness of youth. I promised that I would do what I could.

The card-room, in which we sat, was one in which I was, in the days that followed, to see Mrs. Barry and her cronies often at bridge. It was a gem of a room—decorated with three painted panels of the King and the Queen and the Knave of Hearts in the powder and perukes of the French court. The little tables were covered with rose-colored baize and had borders of dark, rich wood. The gilt chairs were patterned in hearts and diamonds, clubs and spades. The whole thing had been done, it seemed, for one of the ball-gown grandmothers. It was a monument to her frivolity as well as to her fine sense of beauty.

I wondered if the grandmother had ever faced heartache as this lovely young grand-daughter was

facing it. Knowing Lionel as I did, and with all my deep affection for him, I could not see him giving happiness to a loving woman.

I went back to the drawing-room and for the first time had Mimi to myself. She seemed a boyish figure in her riding clothes among all the delicate feminine frills, but no one matched her beauty. "She is mine," my heart sang, and it was heavenly music.

We could talk only of ourselves. There were so many things she had not told me. I was eager to know what had happened while she was still in Maine. How she and Andy had made up after I left.

"He acted as if nothing had happened, and went right on being nice to me."

"Do you know what he did with the pin?"

"No."

I told her that he had thrown it into the pool.

"It is like him," she said, "and he was in a mood to throw you in after it. I am glad he did not see you."

"I am as strong as he," I boasted. "I should have liked to see him try it."

We parted to meet that night at Olga's. The Ogre had, Mimi explained, entertained them a lot since they came back. And it wasn't politic to offend her. "You'll know why when you see her ballroom."

I must confess that the thing jarred. I felt that

I would rather never accept Olga's hospitality than to do it as the rest of them did, with a shrug of the shoulder and an air of scorn as if she owed them more than they asked.

3

That night I saw the peacock portrait. I had arrived at Olga's earlier than the others, for Lionel was to call for Bernice, and I walked over.

Olga greeted me with her slow enthusiasm. "It's nice to see you; I want to have a talk with you. Can't you stay for a little while after the others go?"

I promised; and presently when she was called to the telephone, I strayed through the gorgeous rooms until I came to the balcony which Mimi had described in her letter. The picture hung alone on the wall beyond, flanked by a tapestry or two, and lighted by concealed electric bulbs.

Seen thus it fairly blazed with color. Mimi's arms and neck were bare, and the scant blue of her long bodice melted into a train of peacock feathers. Her face was turned a little so that she looked over her shoulder with a veiled inscrutable glance. In the banded hair of her proud little head was a high carved comb which gave the effect of a peacock's crest, and the great fan which she carried was of the same burnished plumes.

This was not the child Mimi whose memory I

cherished. The artist had given, rather, a hint of what she was to be—"The Proud Lady." Pride was in every line of her. I felt a sudden cold shock of separation. What had I—a crude country boy—to do with this rare creature? How could I ever hope to possess her? The thing was preposterous!

Behind me Olga was saying, "They think I ought to give that to Mimi. But I shan't."

"Why not?"

She blazed. "Oh, if they had treated me fairly. But from the very first they acted as if the whole thing was my fault. I didn't know that my husband had left them out—not until the will was read. I supposed that of course he had looked after them. But they won't believe it. They think I got around him, and influenced him against them. And it has made me obstinate. I'm that kind. The picture is mine and I shall keep it."

She had worked herself into a sort of dull fury. "I shall keep it," she said, and led the way back to the drawing-room.

The Ammidon twins and their satellites had arrived, and after them came, shortly, all the others I had met in the Maine woods. Yet I was aware of an atmosphere of animosity of which I had not been conscious in the Maine cottage. They had accepted Olga's invitation, but here in the Senator's old house she was not one of them as she had been in less formal surroundings. And superadded to this was

a sense of Andy's antagonism which he did not attempt to disguise.

It showed itself in a dozen ways—in his utter disregard of the fact of my presence. He gave me no greeting when he entered, and as the evening went on, throughout dinner, although he was directly across the table from me, he did not address a word to me.

Everybody else was more than kind. They had made delightful plans for me. They wanted me to make engagements for every minute for weeks ahead. I demanded only one thing—that my mornings must be my own.

It was that night, I think, I began to feel the pull of a pleasure-filled existence. The contrast was, perhaps, all the greater because of my recent sojourn in the midst of sorrow and of heart-break. I was glad to put these things behind me. I did not want to forget my mother, but I wanted to forget pain and tragedy and poverty. When we entered the ball-room the feeling was intensified—it was a wonderful place with its side-walls hung in rose brocade, and its ceiling painted with rose garlands upheld by cupids. Crystal chandeliers hung low over our heads giving out a thousand lovely lights from their pendant prisms. To me it was fairyland. All the dreams of my boyhood could not match this moment.

Mimi, to my great delight, gave me the first dance.

Andy glowered, but I was the guest of honor. "And he's been as cross as a bear," Mimi told me.

"Even Andy can't spoil my evening," I told her. "Nothing can spoil it. It's Elysium—and you and I are going to dance on—forever—"

Her light, low laughter answered. "Oh, is there anyone like you, Jerry? Everything with you is a great adventure."

Did anything matter after that?

There were other dances with her, and my rapture increased, so that when the evening was far advanced, and she was dancing with Lionel, I wandered away from the others, and made my way to the balcony where I could be alone and feast my eyes on the picture. Now and then some couple drifted out of the ball-room and drifted back again, and looking down upon them I felt that it was all like the scene of a play, with the beat of the music coming faintly off-stage.

Then, suddenly, Mimi drifted in with Lionel—a slender slip of a thing in silver with a floating scarf of burnished blue. They were both graceful dancers—and the thing was exquisite—the great ball-room beyond as a background—these two slight figures seeming to float over the polished floor.

Mimi lifted her eyes and saw me—and behind Lionel's back she blew me a kiss from the tips of her fingers—a lovely, impulsive gesture—then they drifted back to the ballroom.

As I stood there mad with the joy of it, a hand came down on my shoulder. I turned and faced Andy!

"You've got to stop it," he said without preamble.

"Stop what?"

"Hanging around Mimi."

"That is for Mimi to say."

"Oh, she won't stop you. She knows how to play the game."

I was possessed by a fury which made me want to crack his head open. "Are you talking of the woman you love?"

"You know whom I am talking about. Mimi isn't any angel. But she's mine. I won't have anyone else butting in."

"How are you going to stop me?"

I think he hadn't expected that. He had, I am sure, thought of me as a country boy without a code. But I had a code, and I had the strength with which to back it. Not for nothing had I spent years in the open and on those hard physical tasks of the farm. I was more than his match and I knew it.

So I said, "How are you going to stop it?"

He came a step nearer. "I give you fair warning. You're not her kind. You've unlimited nerve to think she'd look at you. She wouldn't if she wasn't trying to make me jealous."

I was on my feet now. I spoke quietly, but there was the force of a blow behind each word.

"If you speak like that again of Mimi, I'll throw you over this balcony."

He saw that I meant it. Knew the depth of the fall to that shining floor beneath. Hesitated.

"Oh, I'm not here to fight," he blustered.

"It won't be a fight. I shall drop you into the middle of next week."

How queer the old slang sounds now as I write it. But I did not then stop to think of words. "I'm a thousand times stronger than you are," I said, "you wouldn't have a chance with me. If you don't believe it, get Lionel to tell you my record at college."

Oh, I was a fine young cockerel! If I had done what I threatened, I should probably have been locked up before midnight for manslaughter!

But he saved me from that. "This isn't the time," he said, "to settle it. But there'll be a time. So it is hands off of Mimi if you are sensible."

He flung himself down the steps and I saw him making his way towards the ball-room.

His next dance was with Mimi, and I don't know what he said to her. But when she said "Good night," she asked, "What have you done to Andy? He's got it in for you."

I was tempted to tell her of the things we had said to each other. But I could not spoil the moment.

"Oh, he'll get over it," I said, lightly. "And why should I care for Andy, when I am to see you tomorrow?"

As I had promised Olga, I stayed after the others. I did not want to do it. I wanted to wander out under the stars. I was drunk with dreams.

But it was not a bad substitute to sit in the "Turkish Retreat" and talk about Mimi. It was a ghastly place artistically with its black and gold brocade making a sumptuous background for Olga's pink satin and pearls, but it was cozy in a way, and comfortable.

She came at once to the subject which she had on her mind. "So you're in love with Mimi?"

I flushed, "Do I wear it on my sleeve like that? Everybody seems to know it and talk about it."

"Oh, well, reticence is old-fashioned. Frankness is the fashion, especially if it is unpleasant. That's why I hate them all."

She said it without a particle of vindictiveness—calmly—stating a fact.

"They haven't held a thing back from me," she went on. "I'm an interloper. And they seem to think there's no reason why they shouldn't tell me so."

I did not know what to say. I was uncomfortable. Then suddenly she flung a bomb at my feet. "I want you to marry Mimi."

I sat there staring at her. "I mean it," she went

on. "I like her better than any of the rest. And I like you. And I hate Mrs. Le Brun. She's set on having Mimi marry Andy. And—I'd like to disappoint her. Perhaps I can help you a little."

There was, it seemed to me, a touch of treason in her suggestion of an alliance between us—.

"I haven't any right to hope," I told her.

"Yes," she said, "you have." She leaned forward, a sort of pink and ponderous fairy godmother. "She's in love with you, Jerry."

4

The next morning I reviewed my experiences of the past twenty-four hours. I had intensified Andy's feeling of animosity. I had gained a somewhat unwelcome ally in Olga, and the kiss wafted from Mimi's fingers seemed to me the sign and seal of her surrender.

I felt that I must see her. And after breakfast I tried to telephone. Her mother's voice answered. Mimi was still in bed. And she had a busy day before her. Would I call up later?

I called up later. Mimi was out. This time a maid answered. She did not know when Miss Le Brun would be in.

Being thus thwarted, I tried to write on the play. But my thoughts fled to Mimi. I was restless, unable to keep my mind on words . . . and words . . . and words . . . !

I gave it up and took a walk. I sauntered down

a wide and lovely street with the joyous name—King's Highway! There was an old tune which the name suggested. I hummed it under my breath.

"Fair and free, night and day,

"Fair and free is the King's Highway . . ."

How the tune fitted the morning! *"Hug thyself . . . in wealth of state . . . empty purse hath careless gait . . . thou must watch thy chests and bags . . . naught has the beggar to lose but rags . . . ! Wine for thee . . . for me a crust . . . king and beggar . . . they both are dust . . . and dust to dust . . . must return some day . . . e'en as now on the Great Highway . . ."*

In this mood what was more natural than that I should turn towards the street where Mimi dwelt. If I could not see her, I could at least look upon the casket which contained her! Thus I told myself poetically.

I had known that she lived in an apartment house, but I had fancied it would be a glorified place, not cast in the mold of ordinary habitations. But it was nothing of the sort. It was a dingy brick, and I was to learn later that the Le Bruns were on the third floor and that one had to walk up two flights of stairs as there was no elevator.

I passed the house twice, secure in the thought that as Mimi was out, there was no one who knew me. The wind was from the east, and the smoke drifting over the city dulled the sunshine. But it

could not dull the brightness of the day for me. This unpretentious habitation gave me hope. Surely the time would come when I could provide a finer nest than this. My dreams leaped forward. I saw the play a success. I saw other plays. With youth and love a man might move mountains.

I like to think of the boy I was, treading the streets of the old city. Of his lightness of heart. Of his faith in the future.

As I went along I thought of my father, and I wished that he were by my side. I wanted to hear him speak in his tense, ecstatic voice of the goodness of God. I knew that God was good. Through all these years he had led me at last to the woman I loved . . .

Turning back again finally to the boulevard, I saw coming straight towards me—Mimi, walking with her free step, and talking to a little woman who pattered along beside her.

"Jerry," she said, when she saw me, "what are you doing down here?"

"Looking up at Juliet's balcony."

"Not really?" but the pink in her cheeks was lovely.

She presented me to the little woman, "Aunt Lucille, this is Jerry Chandler. Mrs. Merrick is helping with my lovely dresses, Jerry. We have been down town, matching some samples. Aunt

Lucille made my christening robe, and I hope that some day she will help with my wedding things."

The little lady was, I could see at first glance, no ordinary seamstress. She wore old-fashioned and somewhat shabby black. But she wore it with the air of a small princess. She had little feet and little hands, and a straight back. Mimi told me her story afterwards. She was not a blood relation, but she belonged by birth and breeding to that inner circle of which Mimi was a part. She had been a beautiful girl, but had made an unfortunate marriage with a man who had squandered the fortune she had brought him. With a fine pride she had refused to be dependent. She lived in an ancient house which she owned, and she rented rooms. She was convent-bred and did exquisite things with her needle. Her old friends employed her, and treated her always as one of themselves.

"*Cherie,*" she said, with a charming twinkle, "I shall not make your wedding clothes unless I like the man you marry."

"Then please like me," I implored.

She surveyed me with bright appraising eyes. "You are better than most of them."

"Most of them? Are there then so many?"

"Too many. She will, I am afraid, go through the forest like the girl in the story, and pick up a crooked stick."

I smiled at her. "I shall not let her go too far into the forest."

She nodded gayly, and I had a feeling that she liked me. "Women don't know what they want, and men must show them."

I turned back and walked with them, and when we came to the apartment house, I said, "May I come in?"

Mimi hesitated. "I wish I could ask you. But Mother probably isn't up."

"She answered the telphone."

She flashed a quick glance at me. "Did you call me?"

"Early—nine o'clock."

"She—didn't tell me." She was silent for a moment. Then: "Our mornings are dreadfully haphazard—Mother usually has her chocolate in bed about noon."

I had never known houses whose mornings were haphazard or mothers who drank their breakfast chocolate at noon. Yet these things seemed to add rather than subtract from the glamour of Mimi's exotic existence. "Must you go in then?" I demanded, "Why not walk a bit with me?"

"I'd like it." She returned to Mrs. Merrick. "Darling, you needn't worry Mother by telling her that Jerry is with me."

"I never worry your mother by telling her any-

thing, *Cherie.* I shall say that you went back to buy a spool of silk——"

She was charming with her little air of mystery. "For a spool of *blue* silk," she emphasized. "You can get it on Delmar. We forgot it, did we not?"

Mimi blew her a kiss. "Angel," she said, "I wish Mother had your imagination."

So on an enchanted errand, Mimi and I swung together down an enchanted street, lined with enchanted houses, marked by enchanted lampposts, and traversed by enchanted motor vehicles.

"Could anything have been more fortunate," she remarked, as we went along, "than meeting you?"

"It was not fortune," I declared, "it was fate. I called you up. You were in bed. I called again. You were out. Your mother answered the first time and then the maid. But all the Capulets could not keep me from your garden."

"Silly," she said, but her eyes shone.

And after we had walked a few steps in silence she said, "Andy doesn't talk to me like that."

"And if he did?"

"Oh . . .! But he couldn't . . . He was dreadful last night . . . He tried to *make* me say I'd marry him. And when people try to make me do things . . . well, I never do them. I told him I was tired of him . . . that I hoped he would stay

away from me . . . forever . . . . That I wasn't to be *bought* . . . ."

Her breathless vehement voice came to a sudden stop. Her eyes were full of tears.

"I wish," I said, "that I had beaten him up while I had a chance."

"When did you have a chance?"

I told her. "At Olga's."

"Oh . . . no wonder he was in a temper, Jerry. But I am glad nothing really happened. Mother would never have forgiven you . . . When I got home last night I cried and cried . . . I told Mother I wouldn't marry anybody I didn't love. That she must stop talking about Andy . . . That's why she is in bed this morning—and drinking chocolate. When I go up I shall have to sit and hold her hand . . . and tell her I'm sorry."

"But are you sorry?"

Her forehead was ruffled. "Not about Andy. But I am sorry to hurt Mother. She's a darling, but she doesn't know how I feel."

"About what, Mimi?"

"About you, Jerry."

She made her confession frankly—beautifully—with only the rose in her cheeks and her hurried breath to tell of her agitation.

"I don't know whether I am in love with you or not, Jerry . . . but I know that . . . I want to be with you . . . I want to talk to you. . . I've

got all of your letters in a little box. . . I've never saved any other man's letters . . . "

Oh, to be told that with all the world about us. I wanted to be in the middle of a wood . . .

"Dearest, dearest. . ."

"I am not sure that I ought to be saying this, Jerry."

"It is wonderful to hear you saying it."

"But it can't come to anything."

"We'll make it come to something."

Swinging along by her side everything seemed possible. The sun shone on us, the world moved towards our twin destinies—the future was ours!

Well, we bought the spool of silk. We bought, indeed, two spools. One for me. "I shall carry it in my pocket, Mimi, in memory of this morning."

I took her finally to her corner, and we parted with a handclasp which left me tingling. Then I stood and watched her until the big door of the dingy house closed upon her.

On my way home I passed an old church and went in. It was Roman Catholic, and I had entered few edifices of that faith. But I wanted to be on my knees. God and Mimi. The old belief linked with my new-found happiness.

There was the fragrance of incense, the thin gold line of candles on the altar, the lights of other little candles at various shrines . . . the dimness . . . the silence. . .

CHAPTER VI

1

It was on Thursday that I had walked with Mimi, and I did not see her again until Sunday night when we were entertained at supper, although I talked with her by telephone, and on Saturday sent her violets.

Her time was, she said, much taken up by dressmakers, tailors, milliners. She was to be maid of honor at the Veiled Prophet's Ball—that superlative event of the autumn carnival which links a modern city with the light-hearted festivals of past centuries. Each year the people of St. Louis forget the workaday world, and give themselves gaily to the mystical celebration. They decorate their streets with pennants of purple and gold for the great parade, they open their houses for the tide of visitors which sweeps over the threshold of the town, and in splendid jewels and gorgeous gowns they welcome the Prophet to the Court of Honor where he crowns his Queen of Love and Beauty.

I found it hard to reconcile the fact of Mimi's professed poverty with the elaborate wardrobe she was preparing. But Lionel informed me that the distinction conferred on a debutante by her choice as maid of honor becomes a family affair, and brings

gifts from rich relatives who feel there must be nothing lacking which may contribute to the success of her presentation.

Since I could not have Mimi, I settled myself to work, shut myself up in my room at the hotel, and finished the play.

I read it to Lionel on Saturday morning, while he lay in bed with his coffee on a tray beside him.

"It's great," he said, when I finished.

"I'm not sure. It all depends on whether we can get our idea over."

He lighted a cigarette with nervous fingers. "We've got to get it over, Jerry. I'm desperately hard up for money. I've had such darned luck lately. Dad can't help me out, and Bernice's father is acting like the heavy villain in a melodrama . . . " He dug his cigarette in a tray to get rid of the ashes. "If he drives me too hard, I'll marry her, and come back and say 'Here we are. Give us your blessing.' "

"But suppose he shouldn't give it?"

"He wouldn't be willing to see Bernice suffer."

"Oh, but look here . . . "

"Well?"

"Wouldn't the whole thing be hard on Bernice?"

He did not answer for a moment, then he gave me a straight glance. "It was she who suggested it."

2

Well, we sent the play off that afternoon to an agent who had promised to do his best for us. Then we went on to Bernice's. Mrs. Barry was having two tables of bridge. Bernice and I did not play. But Lionel did, while Bernice and I sat in the window-seat of the card-room and talked. The scene reminded me of something in Thackeray, or some old English print. The women flushed and eager, the men eager but calm, the soft lights on the shining dresses, the painted Knave and Queen and King on the walls, with their perukes and patches and powder.

"I believe Lionel loves cards better than he does me," Bernice said wistfully, "I wanted him to ride this afternoon, but he wouldn't."

"I'll ride with you."

She shook her head. "It would be too late by the time I dressed."

"And anyhow you want Lion."

"Yes. And that's not saying anything against your charms, Jerry. But your eyes are all for Mimi . . . Oh, it is every Jack for his Jill, isn't it? And I am taking the wrong attitude with Lion. I know it, but I don't seem to be able to help it. Somehow I can't play the game with him as I do with other men. Yet it might do him good."

I felt very sorry for her. And I felt, I'll confess, a bit uncomfortable. I had been bred to reticence. And

it seemed to me astounding that Bernice could pour out her heart to me. I knew that she suffered. There were shadows under her eyes, and she fingered nervously a string of pearls which she wore about her neck. They were beautiful pearls, and to break the silence which had fallen upon us, I remarked, "What a charming clasp!"

"Of my necklace? Isn't it?" she unfastened it to show me. It was a shamrock in emeralds. "My grandmother was Irish, and these came from her. I don't often wear them. But they suit this gown. Lionel likes me in green."

"Lionel likes you in anything."

"Does he? You're a comfortable person, Jerry."

"Am I? Oh, look here, Bernice. You mustn't be downhearted. Lionel can do big things, if he is willing to work. He has real talent."

"Yet he—plays bridge," with some bitterness.

"I believe he'll buckle down. Especially if we sell the play. You'll see."

"Do you really think he will?"

"Yes." Then plunging in blindly, I said the thing I felt ought to be said, "But you must not marry him, Bernice, until he has made good."

"I'll marry him and help him."

"I wouldn't if I were you. It isn't wise."

Her voice shook. "It isn't easy to do wise things, Jerry. Not when you have always done the things

you want to do. Lionel and I haven't been trained for hardness."

Well, I had been trained for hardness. Yet I wondered if anything could make me give up my dreams of marriage with Mimi.

So we sat there, Bernice and I, two young things oppressed by problems which are as old as the ages. And from the walls the simpering Queen and King and Knave who for a century had watched people come and go and win and lose, looked down on us with cynical eyes.

Lionel lost every rubber. He came over and told us when the game was ended. "I shall have to pawn my jewels," he said, "if this keeps up."

But while his tone was light his eyes were moody. Bernice put a comforting hand on his arm. But though it lay there like a snowflake, he made no sign that he saw it.

3

On Sunday night, for the first time I met Mimi's mother, and from the moment I saw her I knew that it was war between us. She greeted me pleasantly enough, but there was no real warmth in her manner. She was a slender little woman, so young-looking that it seemed incredible she should have a grown daughter. She was, perhaps, the same age as my mother, yet there might have been a generation between them. Mrs. Le Brun's gay air of

fashion, the touch of rouge on her cheeks, the glint of her hair, her smooth, fair neck girdled with pearls, these things seemed to divide her by years from that tiny grey ghost which haunted our old house.

The little apartment in spite if its cramped six rooms was most attractive. The furniture was excellent—inherited treasures. And Mimi's colors were evident in the blue of the draperies, the burnished green of old porcelain, the copper of certain bowls and candlesticks. There were little saffron roses in the copper bowls. Andy had, I learned, sent them.

But she wore my violets!

Andy was there, of course, and while he had little to say to me, his manner had in it nothing of open enmity. When I knew him better, I found that, while his temper was hot and got beyond him at times, he did not, as a rule, fight in the open. I think that, too, in cold blood he refused to look upon me as a rival. His pride would not admit that Mimi's interest in me could match her interest in himself.

At supper I sat beside Mimi. It was a most informal meal—Lionel presided at one chafing dish, and Mrs. Le Brun at the other. It interested me to see Lionel's deftness. I had never been among men who counted the making of a rarebit a fine art. I had melted cheese more than once in my mother's

kitchen, and had toasted the bread over the glowing coals. The contrast between the two backgrounds came to me as I sat there in the tight little rooms with their effect of luxury, and I wondered if there wasn't something to be said for the beauty of that low, wide kitchen, which pretended to be nothing, but which was really so much.

Yet with Mimi beside me, I had little time for memories. She told me of her adventures since the morning we had walked together.

"I am worn to a frazzle, Jerry. I've had to stand for *hours,* trying on. But my things are beautiful."

"You are beautiful," I told her. "You'd be lovely in calico."

She shivered. "I shouldn't, I need silky things, Jerry, and shiny, sparkly things, and flippity-flopping trains. You ought to see my maid-of-honor dress."

"Show it to me," I said promptly.

"Shall I?" she considered it a moment, then raised her voice to command the attention of the others.

"I am going to show you my new gowns," she proclaimed.

"Mimi," her mother protested, "You're not."

"Yes, I am. Everybody who wants to see them, hold up their hands."

All the hands went up. There was much laughter.

Mimi made them a little bow. "It was Jerry's idea. He has never seen a maid-of-honor gown. And I want to dazzle him."

Andy darkened. And Mrs. Le Brun's swift glance crossed the table like the flash of a sword.

"Mimi," she emphasized, "everything is in boxes, or wrapped up in sheets."

"Everything will be out of boxes and unwrapped from sheets in a minute, Mother."

She pressed all of the men into service, and formed us into a procession from the living-room to her own room, and we came back with fragrant silken armfuls, making half a dozen trips before all of the boxes were emptied.

Being mere man, how am I to describe what followed? The lovely robes heaped on chairs and tables—Mimi in the midst of them—holding this one up so that we might see the lines of it—arraying herself in splendid cloaks and capes, spreading out the train of the maid-of-honor dress—pearl-embroidered, fur-edged. Andy's eyes on her, gloating. Mrs. Le Brun, smiling, but watchful and intent.

For Mimi kept saying, "Do you like this, Jerry?" and "This is a design of silver peacock feathers, Jerry," and "The ermine on this cape was Mother's, Jerry. She wore it when she was queen of love and beauty over twenty years ago."

Yet in spite of her friendliness, I was oppressed by it all. It seemed to me that Mimi, the child

Mimi, was being smothered in velvet and fur and weighed down by heavy embroideries of gold and silver and pearl; that all of this extravagance was the chain which bound her to a life of luxury, and which would drag her towards marriage with someone who could wrap her always in purple and fine linen. And I, impotent to break that chain, must see her torn away from me . . .

Perhaps my face showed something of what I felt, for while young Sylvester in gorgeous cloak and feathered hat, amid the laughter of the crowd, was giving an imitation of Mimi making her first bow to society, she left the center of the stage, and came and sat beside me.

"You are as solemn as an owl, Jerry. What's the matter?"

"I am not used to such grandness. It makes me feel miles away from you."

Her voice was sharp. She was tired, excited. "You know I am not miles away from you. But I shall be if you don't want me to enjoy pretty things."

"I do want you to enjoy them."

"No, you don't. I am afraid you are a prig, Jerry, and a Puritan."

If she had struck me in the face she could not have more astounded me. I was too inexperienced in the ways of women to understand that the exacting and difficult days just past had brought her a

state of mind which made her actually hysterical. She was hurt, too, to the heart, by my lack of response to her mood.

"Why shouldn't you enjoy things with me," she went on rapidly, "This is my life and I—love it. I hate poverty—and cheap clothes . . . "

Sylvester was calling her, and whirling away from me, she was again the center of the crowd. Yet I was aware presently that the zest of the thing was ended for her, and at last she threw up her hands in a little gesture of despair. "Isn't everybody tired of me? I know I'm tired of myself. Let's do something else."

Her mother exclaimed, "Not with everything in such confusion, Mimi."

"I adore confusion, Mother."

"But Mimi—."

"Oh, well, I'll let the boys work for us. They can put everything back in the boxes."

"I shan't work," Sylvester declared, "unless I know what the prize will be."

They gathered around her—Andy and Lionel, Stiles and Sylvester, with the other youths who made up the crowd. Mimi was sitting on the arm of a carved mahogany sofa—swinging a slippered foot, a shining lovely figure with her burnished blue dress, and red-gold hair.

She glanced across at me, glanced away. I had not moved from my seat. She spoke in a high

hurried tone. "I'll give a—kiss . . . to the one who does the best work . . . and Jerry shall be one of the judges . . . and Katherine . . . and Bernice . . . "

In the midst of a roar of laughter, I said, "I shall not be a judge. I shall compete." I laughed with them. I flung it off lightly. None of them should know my awful sense of disillusionment. It was as if the Blessed Damosel had bartered her favors.

We worked feverishly, all of us. I knew that absolutely I had the best chance of winning. Not for nothing were all the years when my mother had trained me in orderly habits. I had always brushed my own clothes and folded them. I had helped her with the putting away of winter things and the getting out of the summer ones. And these young sybarites had had no training—especially Andy. His man had done things for him. He worked awkwardly, ineffectively, while I packed boxes with the regularity of a machine. And as I packed I wondered what I should do with the prize when I had won it.

Alice Ammidon was the third judge, and I knew she liked me, so did Katherine and Bernice. And they were all good sports. Their verdict would, I knew, be a fair one.

While the contest was on, Mimi sat on the arm of the sofa swinging her foot. I know now that she was heartily sorry for the thing she had done,

but there was no sign of it on her smiling countenance. It seemed to me dreadful that she could sit there and smile!

At last the boxes were filled—the judges inspected them; were given slips of paper on which they wrote their decisions; handed them to Mimi.

She read them, lifted her head and looked at me.

"Jerry wins," she said.

I don't know what she expected. I don't know what any of them expected. Some banal scene, no doubt, in which she paid her debt!

But I stood there in the middle of the floor, laughing a little, carrying it off. My sense of drama had come to my aid. I felt like a man in a play!

"This is not the time or the place," I told her, "I want your I. O. U., Mimi." I picked up a pencil and a slip of paper which one of the judges had discarded, "write on this—*'I promise to pay—on demand . . . !'*"

Her hand when she took the pencil was cold. But she, too, carried it off. She scribbled for a moment, folded the paper and handed it back to me.

I opened it, read it, folded it again, and with apparent calmness put it in my pocket.

But my blood was racing madly, for this was what she had written:

"Oh, Jerry, I am such a little fool. And you are such a darling!"

4

That was always the charm of Mimi—the delicious unexpectedness of her. Her moments of surrender made up for all the tempests which preceded them. A touch of arrogance was her inheritance. A loving heart was her endowment. The two warred with each other endlessly.

I think if she had been left to herself she would never have hidden her heart from me. But her mother's ambition, her mother's influence, swayed her. I will not say that her mother was all to blame. Mimi, like a cat which has always had a warm hearth, loved luxury. And she had been made to feel that her beauty was a marketable thing, that it must bring her not only a prince but a kingdom. Indeed, any prince might do, it was the kingdom which counted. Looking back upon it, I know it was a devastating thing that she should have been thus trained. And whatever regrets I may have for what came after, I am sure that in a sense I saved her.

As the days went on I became more and more convinced that she cared for me. Yet she would promise nothing.

"I can't marry you, Jerry. I can't. Let's live for today, and not look ahead."

Well, we lived for the day. I saw her everywhere. I danced with her, rode with her, talked in terms of burning eloquence.

With it all, however, I never claimed the kiss that I had won. We never spoke of it. It was a lovely secret which lay between us . . .

Thanks to my friendship for Mimi and for Lionel, I was invited everywhere. I found myself swept on by a tumultuous tide. Staking everything on the success of the play, I refused to look my financial future in the face. From morning to night I was whirled from one excitement to another, gaily, continuously.

The life of my boyhood receded more and more into the background. The tragic months of the summer when I had watched my mother die might never have been. Memories of Uncle Jerry's arguments beat against my brain. Why should I, too, not have my cake and eat it?

"And so," said Stiles Sanderson to me one day, "you are liking Vanity Fair?"

"It's great."

"What are you writing?"

"We are waiting to hear from the play. If it is a success, Lionel and I will do more of them."

"Don't wait. Go shut yourself in a tall tower, and show the people what you can do."

But I had no wish for a tall tower. I wanted this wide fair plain. I more than liked Vanity Fair. It was picturesque, prodigal. And Mimi was a part of it. That was enough for me.

There was this to be said for Mimi. If she would

not marry me, she would have no other. In vain her mother wept over her morning chocolate.

"I am sorry, dearest," Mimi told her, "but I don't want to get married."

"You can't know what you are throwing away. Andy won't wait forever."

"I don't want him to wait."

"But he can give you—everything."

"I should have to take him with—everything. And he isn't worth it."

"But— Oh, you can't be so *foolish,* Mimi. If you won't think of yourself, you might think of me. I have so many cares— I can't sleep nights."

Mimi, repeating this conversation to me, remarked, "She hates to be poor. You see she has never been until now."

It was late on the night of the Veiled Prophet's Ball that Mrs. Le Brun came out into the open and challenged me.

I had been thrilled by the mystical, spectacular ceremony, the beauty of the ladies of the Court, the splendor of their gowns, the dazzling display of jewels. It had seemed to me marvelous that these well-groomed men and gracious women could doff so easily their sophistication and enter whole-heartedly into the spirit of fun and folly.

Mimi looked like an angel, or a princess, or a fairy queen. Not even the chosen queen could compare with her. And as I had watched her daz-

zling progress on her way to do homage to the Court, I had wondered how I ever dared lift my eyes to her.

She carried a fan of peacock feathers—the one which had been painted in the portrait, and I heard a woman behind me say, "Mimi Le Brun must want bad luck. I wouldn't wear peacock feathers for anything in the world."

"I am not superstitious," was the cold response.

"It means death, my dear, or some dreadful trouble. Oh, you may think I am silly. But I had an old black Mammy . . . "

They passed on . . . and I smiled to myself. Death and Mimi? . . . the thing was preposterous . . . ! She was as brilliantly alive as a spring morning! And as beautiful.

I made my way through the crowd. The Queen had been crowned, and in a few moments there would be dancing. I wanted to get as soon as possible to Mimi. I had been promised a dance.

Mrs. Le Brun sat with a group of matrons, many of whom like herself had been former Queens. I spoke to her, and to my surprise she rose and drew me away from the others. "I want to talk to you a bit, Jerry—" she was sparkling, secure, dangerous, "about Mimi."

I was at once on guard; but I said with an effect of composure, "Not any of them could hold a candle to her, could they? She should have been Queen."

"She might have been had her grandfather lived."

"She should have been anyhow."

She did not continue the theme. She had other things on her mind. Her voice was clear, incisive, as she said, "Jerry—you mustn't fall in love with her."

"I have already fallen in love."

"You know of course that she can't marry you."

"I know that whether I marry her or not, my life is at her feet."

She laughed, lightly, "Surely you don't believe that any man is at any woman's feet for life."

"I don't know about other men. I know myself."

She stopped and we stood there with that careless crowd surging about us. Yet we might have been marooned on an island in an empty sea for all that anyone else mattered.

"It isn't quite fair to Mimi, Jerry, for you to talk high romance when you can't talk marriage."

"I would talk marriage if she would listen."

"But you haven't anything to marry on."

"I have my allowance from my Uncle Jerry, and I am his heir."

I flung the statement at her as I had flung it at Lionel in college. I felt that it might modify her attitude. And in a sense it did.

"Is he very rich?" she demanded.

"He hasn't millions, if you mean that," I admitted. "But there would be enough."

"Enough for what? Not for Mimi's future. And anyhow it may be years before you inherit. Don't you see how impossible it is, Jerry? Poverty is *dreadful.* I won't have Mimi poor."

There was an almost hysterical fierceness in her way of saying it, yet she kept her voice to a low key. "If my father had not married again, we should have lived in his house, have had everything. He thought he was in love," she swept the possibility away with a scornful gesture. "And you think you are in love. Men are like that . . . They want what they want. But you aren't thinking of Mimi's happiness. Only of your own. Don't you call that a bit selfish, Jerry?"

Well, it was natural for a mother to fight for her young. She was like a sleek and shining cat defending her kitten.

"I won't have her winter spoiled by you, Jerry. It is the most important winter of her life. Yet you've caught her fancy. Such things never last with her. You are something new—different. That's all there is to it."

"There is more to it than that," I said, "there is Fate and our faith in ourselves."

The words were an echo of the things my father had often said to me. Only he would have put it "Faith in God and in ourselves." But in neither case would Mrs. Le Brun have understood. She simply stared and said in a level voice, "People

who live in the clouds, Jerry, are sure to get hurt . . . I'm sorry . . . "

The music was sweeping in great waves over us. The dancing had begun. A distinguished and gray-haired man came to claim Mrs. Le Brun. She did not present me to him. She left me high and dry on the shores of her displeasure!

5

The next morning I had a letter from Mimi. She sent it by messenger and I opened it with a premonition of disaster.

"Mother has made me promise not to see so much of you, Jerry. She says it can't come to anything, and that it is simply unsettling me. And perhaps she is right, I don't know. Anyhow she came into my room last night and begged me to give you up. I wouldn't promise that I wouldn't see you at all. But I agreed not to ask you to come here, and not to make engagements with you. I shall miss our walks together, Jerry, and our talks. But perhaps I am not all the wonderful things you say I am. If I were really the woman of your dreams, I would think the world well lost, wouldn't I? And I don't. So you are not to think of me as Juliet on a balcony, or that I'd cut myself up in little stars . . . I am like the young women in the nursery rhyme . . .

just 'ribbons and laces' and my face is my fortune, Jerry.

"This isn't the kind of letter mother expects me to write. But it is the best I can do. I am not the heroine of a play. I am not the heroine of anything. I am awfully human, though you won't believe it.

"It has been wonderful to have you for a friend. It will always be wonderful to remember. And of course this isn't 'Good-bye, forever'—like Tosti's song. Only you mustn't hope any more, and I mustn't dream—and that's all there is to it. It won't be the same but it will be something."

I spoiled many sheets of paper before I answered her. So I can reproduce what I wrote, in part. I filed it away with her note, and the yellow pages seem even now to flame with a living fire.

"You *are* Juliet on a balcony. You are the Blessed Damosel bending down. You are Beatrice to be worshipped. You are Rachel to be waited for. If I do not see you, you will still be in my heart. Remember that, Mimi. There has never been any other in my life, there will never be. If the play succeeds, I shall have something to offer you. But whether it succeeds or not, I shall work for you, wait for the perfect moment when I can call you mine."

High-flown. Well, call it that if you wish. But I was sincere. As a boy I had thought in terms of chivalry. I had been fed on King Arthur, and his Round Table Knights. I had copied in my notebook such things as this:

"A glorious company, the flower of men,
To serve as model for the mighty world,
And be the fair beginning of a time . . .
. . .To love one maid only, cleave to her,
And worship her by years of noble deeds,
Until they won her . . ."

I had read my Bible, and of Jacob and his seven years; I had read Ruskin, and his challenge to the youth of his day to serve like Jacob.

You see, my ideals of womanhood had been formed by my father, and they had been modified very little even by my adoration of Uncle Jerry and his swashbuckling methods, or by contact with my mates at college, who refused to put femininity on a pedestal and who held that the girls with whom they danced and flirted and to whom they made love had as many human faults and frailties as themselves.

So in a passion of devotion I dispatched my letter, and it was not until several days had passed without a glimpse of Mimi that I began to feel the reaction. I had a sort of boyish dignity, of pride if you will, which made me refuse to put myself in her way when she had forbidden it. But I was

filled with an intolerable ache for her. For the first time in my life I could not square my optimism with the thing which had happened to me. In desperate despair I turned to my work. I shut myself up in my room and wrote. I refused invitations. It seemed to me that if I saw Mimi I should fall on my knees and beg her to give me hope. Yet I would not ask again for what she would not give. And always I waited for the moment when the acceptance of the play would make it possible for me to lay my laurels at my lady's feet.

Then, suddenly, like a crash of thunder from a clear sky, or the sickening swing of an earthquake on a golden day, a letter came from our agent. He was sorry, he said, but a reading of the manuscript had convinced him that it would have no chance whatever with producers, and he did not feel justified in offering it to them. It had merits, but it showed plainly our lack of technical knowledge of the stage. And he was returning it!

CHAPTER VII

1

Lionel raged when he read the agents' letter.

"After all his promises."

"He didn't promise anything, Lion, except to give it a reading, and to push it if it was worth it."

"But it is a good play, Jerry."

"Is it? I am not so sure. As he says, we need experience."

"Lots of first plays get by—" he flung back at me.

We were in Lionel's room, and I stood at the window looking out. It was raining—a dreary, autumn rain, with a thick smoky sky above it. In the Park across the street the storm had swept the trees bare—some blight seemed to have fallen on the golden city which I had entered with such high hopes.

"I'll have to leave the hotel," I said, "I can't afford it."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," Lionel exploded, "I want to go on with the play."

"I can't live on rejected manuscripts."

He turned on me in a sort of fury, "Why should they be rejected? Don't you think I can do it?"

I did not answer at once. I knew he was asking

of me what he had so often asked, implicit belief in his powers. Yet a spirit of discouragement gripped me. The wind had risen and the rain washed down the windows. I looked out on a streaming world, and felt as if a blank wall blotted out my future.

"It will take time to find out what either of us can do," I said, "and in the meantime I can't afford to stay here."

He did not look at me. "Of course if you feel like that."

I knew that he was angry, hurt, overthrown by the disaster which had come upon us. Yet I had nothing to say to him. I, too, was overthrown.

I was glad when, breaking in on our silence, the telephone rang. We had been, I felt, on the edge of a quarrel. Any interruption was welcome.

It was Bernice, wanting Lionel to have tea with her.

He demurred. "I should simply weep on your shoulder, Honey. The play has been rejected, and Jerry and I are throwing bricks at each other."

She argued with him, evidently, and his voice took on a softer note. "You are a darling . . . Yes . . . at four . . ."

He hung up the receiver. "She's too good for me, Jerry," he said, soberly, and stood beside me looking out at the streaming rain.

I laid my hand on his arm. We did not speak. But the anger had gone out of us.

When Lionel left me I faced the facts. I must find some way to retrench. I had mortgaged my allowance for several months ahead. It was out of the question for me to engage in other work than literature. I was dedicated to that, and I must prove myself to Mimi. Since I had no money, I must have fame to lay at her feet.

I decided, that, all else failing, I would ask a loan of my father. I could pay him at my leisure. I sat down and wrote to him. It was not the letter of a prodigal. There had been, of course, no husks and swine. I admitted I had been foolish. I had lived beyond my means; but the temptation had been great and there was still much at stake.

When I had posted the letter my spirits rose. It was five o'clock and still raining. I wanted more than anything in the world to see Mimi. I felt that if she knew my plight she would be moved to tenderness. Yet I dared not call her up.

Restless, yearning for a confidante, I telephoned to Olga. "May I come over?"

"*Jerry?* But you have neglected me shamefully. I don't know whether I ought to forgive you."

"I have been up to my ears in work, writing a play with Lionel, and this morning it came back to us. It was an awful blow."

She melted at once. "Come, tell me about it."

I went, and found it comforting to have Olga's sympathy. Even the awful Turkish Retreat seemed to glow with a pleasant brightness after the dreariness outside.

"Of course you mustn't leave town," she said, when she had heard my woeful tale, "we'll have to find some other way out of it."

I told her that I had written to my father. "If he lends me the money, I'll be all right."

Coffee had been brought in, and she poured a cup for me, and then one for herself which she made sweet with much sugar and mellow with cream. She ate with it one of the fat chocolate cakes which added so many pounds to her overabundant figure.

"If your father won't lend it to you," she said at last, "I will."

I flushed, "I couldn't do that."

"Why not?"

"Well, I couldn't."

She turned that over in her mind, and said at last, "If you leave here you'll lose Mimi. How can you expect to hold her when you are two hundred miles away? A girl like that, with men swarming about her like bees? They all have money, and the things she wants, and you haven't anything to offer but a pack of dreams——"

I knew what she said was true, but I wasn't will-

ing to admit it. "If she is the woman I think she is, she'll wait."

Olga made an impatient movement. "Jerry, she won't. Don't fool yourself. I know more of life than you do. Mimi hasn't time these days to think. She hasn't time for anything. She is swept on from one excitement to another. She is caught in a tide too strong to resist."

"She will resist," I said, "underneath it all she loves me. I know that she loves me."

"Well, let her prove it," said Olga, "I will make it possible for her to marry you. We'll see if she will do it."

I looked at her in astonishment. "Make it possible?"

"Yes. I'll offer her a share of her grandfather's money. It won't be such a fortune as Andy could give her. But it will save her from marrying him —if she wants to be saved."

My mind was in a tumult. I had a feeling that the whole thing was fantastic, too much like a fairy-tale. Here was Mimi among the ashes as it were, and Olga would wave a wand. The Ogre would become in effect the benevolent fairy-godmother.

"What do you think of it?" Olga asked.

I stammered, "I don't know."

"Why don't you know?"

"Well, it is a lot to expect of you."

"It isn't half as much as Mrs. Le Brun expects—"

there was a touch of bitterness in her tone. "I have always felt that the Senator's will should have been different. But I have hated the family's attitude about it—their shutting me out as if it were my fault. But I'd like to have you happy, Jerry. And if you want Mimi you shall have her."

It was a strange and rather spectacular thing for her to do. But I was sure she was right when she said that her inheritance had made her uncomfortable, and she took this way, in part, to square things. "I shall tell Mimi that she can have it if she will marry you."

I protested, "Don't tie any strings to it. She must be free to decide."

"Are you afraid to put her to the test, Jerry? If she loves you, she won't question any conditions I may make."

"But her pride——"

"Pride?" With scorn, "Peacock feathers—! Vanity—! Everyone in that family has been willing to take things at my hands. If they had been proud, they would have worked their fingers to the bone before they would have accepted a favor."

I knew that what she said was true, and that I, too, had wondered that they could take so much and give so little.

Yet I argued with her. Defended them. And at last said, desperately, "I will have nothing to do with it, unless she is left free."

She was as obstinate as I, "Then I shan't offer it, Jerry. I am giving it to you as much as to Mimi. And I won't have Mrs. Le Brun sharing it."

At last I weakened. "I want her to be happy. And I can make her happy."

"Of course you can. Shall we call it settled then?"

There seemed nothing else to do but acquiesce, yet I was still doubtful when she announced her plans.

Mimi was to make her bow to society in ten days. Invitations were already out to the dance in the rose ballroom.

"I shall tell her then, Jerry. In the library. And you shall be there."

She was so sure that things would go well with me that I tried to share her optimism. On the back of my own invitation to the ball, Mimi had written, "I am going to give you two dances, Jerry. And we will sit out one of them. I have a thousand things to say to you."

On that hope I lived. I was restless, eager. In ten days, perhaps, my world would change. Yet when I allowed my thoughts to dwell on Olga's fantastic scheme I found myself liking it less and less. It would mean that I must go to Mimi with my hands empty—. That she would give and I would take . . .

Yet I saw no other way out of it.

Before the night of the ball, two things happened—I had a letter from my father in which he refused to lend me money, and I discovered that Lionel had paid his debts by pawning Bernice's pearls.

I did not learn this latter fact from Lionel. I had gone to his room after my visit with Olga. He was not yet dressed for dinner, and as I was ready, I sat down in a big chair by his table to wait for him. There was a reading-lamp on the table which drew around itself a golden circle, and just beyond the circle I was aware of a flash of vivid green. At first I thought the light was playing tricks on me; then I saw that an open leather jewel-case lay among the books, and in the case was a string of pearls with an emerald shamrock clasp.

Bernice's pearls! There was no mistaking them! She had offered them on the altar of her love for Lionel, and I knew how lightly he had accepted the sacrifice.

I did not want him to know that I had seen them —so I laid the evening paper over the leather case, and the next day when he told me jauntily that he had managed to get some money, my cheeks burned with my knowledge of the truth.

The letter from my father was so like him that I felt no sense of indignation or of anger at his refusal to grant my request.

"I can't do it, Jerry. The thing that I want for you is strength, and I pray every night on my knees

that it may be given you. You will never have it as long as you lean on me. You have been more than fortunate—although I am not sure even yet that it is good fortune to have an income provided which will permit you to go on with your chosen work. If that income has not been sufficient, it is because you have not learned the first lesson a man has to learn, to live on what he has, no matter at what sacrifice.

"Does that sound harsh? My dear boy, you know my love for you. So I shall not offer any excuse. Except perhaps this one—that to let you have the money would be to deprive your grandmother and your aunt of the things I had hoped might make them comfortable this winter. And I know you too well to believe that you would want me to do that. There must be a new heating plant of some kind, if we are to be warm. Our old stoves are not adequate. If I send you the money, I am afraid your grandmother's ancient bones will ache.

"I have this to say, however. Why not come to us for a few months? You ought to be able to do some writing here in this quiet place, where you will be undisturbed by outside forces. Spend your Christmas with us, Jerry, and our hearts will be glad. Then if you want to go back—God speed you.

"As for the woman you love. If she really cares, she will find it out when you are away from her. Her heart will travel to you across the miles.

"Write to me at once and let me know that you understand this letter and my motive in failing to let you have the money. The fact that I want you to have it more than I want my mother and sister to have new stoves shows how my sense of justice is blurred by my affection for you. I'd rather freeze all winter than leave a wish of your's ungranted. So you see how weak I am, and it takes the memory of your mother's voice . . . 'You must think of his good, Stephen,' to hold me to my purpose."

I have my father's letter yet, and have copied it. It shows the battle which he fought between his love for his son, and his fear that he might spoil him.

I answered at once, and told him that I understood, but that I could not be sure of coming to him at Christmas time. Things must work out for me a bit before I made my decision. I did not tell him that my fate hung in the balance, and that if I came to him my hopes would be dead.

2

The picture which the rose ballroom presented on the night of the crowning event was an unforgettable one of loveliness and luxury. It was the last time that I was to take part in such festivities. I did not know it then, but in a few days I was to leave behind me, forever, this world of silken shin-

ing beauty, of rosy effulgence, of care-free indulgence, of gay assumption that nothing in the world mattered but a good time.

Olga had let me come early, and I was at the door when Mimi arrived. The fur of her gorgeous wrap reached to her ears, and above the fur was the radiance of her glance, the beauty of her hair. For once she had foresworn her favorite colors, so that she matched the ballroom in her rosiness. As her cloak fell back, I caught my breath—she was exquisite, so absolutely a creature of the world which encompassed her—silver slippers, silver butterflies on the rosy tulle.

She gave me her hand and it went to my lips. Neither of us spoke, yet my heart cried out to her, and I think the cry was answered.

We had only that moment, for Mrs. Le Brun, who had stopped to speak to Olga, came up to us. "The guests are arriving, Mimi," she said, "you'd better run in and be ready for them—" Then she spoke to me with an air of maddening patronage. "You've been a good boy, Jerry. You can see her now as often as you wish. The danger is over."

She swept on and up the stairs, leaving me stranded on the shores of apprehension. She seemed so secure, so triumphant.

Yet nothing could rob me of the rapture of the thought that Mimi was under the same roof with me. That I could feast my eyes upon her. I made

my way to the balcony, and looked down to where I could see her standing just beyond the arched entrance to the ballroom. She saw me, and fluttered her fingers up towards me in a charming gesture. I waved back, and sat there for a long time alone, gazing down. I saw Andy, erect and assured of manner, standing with an irritating air of proprietorship beside Mimi. I saw Mrs. Barry and Bernice—with Lionel in attendance—I saw Katherine Merrill and Stiles Sanderson, and the Ammidon twins—. I saw Olga elbow to elbow with Mrs. Le Brun, and regal in gold tissue and the family diamonds. Many times in later years the scene was to come back to me—the fluid color of it—the astonishing separation of it from all that had to do with squalor and sordidness—its absolutely artificial quality and its fascination.

Many single incidents stand out in my memory of that night, yet, except for the final dramatic climax, none more vividly than my talk with Bernice.

We had danced together, and afterwards had wandered out into the great sun-room, which, with its Italian marbles, its gay tropical birds on perches lent itself perfectly to the decorative scheme of a rose-garden, overtopped by a sky of turquoise silk.

Bernice had seemed to me quite like the girl I had first met, gay, irresponsible, audacious.

"Something has happened to you," I told her. "You act as it you hadn't a care in the world."

"I haven't." Then with a sudden change of tone, "Jerry, what is your idea of Heaven?"

"Oh, a place of happiness, I suppose. Why?"

"If it is a place where we get what we want . . . well, I'm in heaven, Jerry . . . I am going to marry Lionel . . ."

I was startled, and I confess, dismayed. "When?"

She hesitated, "Tomorrow. Oh, Jerry, I shouldn't have told you. But it slipped out. We meant it to be a secret."

"Do you mean that your father and mother don't know?"

"We couldn't tell them . . .Do you think we are wrong? Do you?"

"I think you are taking great chances."

"But why? We've got to do something. Lionel needs money. And he can't get it. And—and I have some property in my own right——"

"And you will let him have it, as you let him have the pearls?"

Her cheeks were hot, "You knew that?"

"I saw them on Lionel's table. He doesn't know that I saw them."

All the brightness went out of her glance. "I've had an awful time keeping it from mother. She

wanted me to wear them tonight. I told her the clasp was broken . . . and I hate—lies."

I knew she was an honest little thing, sound and sweet under the overlay of frivolity. I tried to warn her. "Don't you see what a net you are drawing about yourself? And it isn't helping Lionel."

"Why not?"

"A woman doesn't help a man when she encourages him to do things like that . . . Lionel is my friend, but I should hate to see you marry him, Bernice."

"Jerry, don't—" her face was white.

The truth came to me then like a blow. "You are married already, Bernice?'

"Yes."

"When?"

"This morning. I am going to tell mother tonight. If—if she and father don't forgive us, we are going away, and they'll want us back. They won't hold out."

"But suppose they should hold out, Bernice?"

"Then Lionel and I shall have each other."

The look in her eyes stopped the words that were on my lips. Why talk of a thing which was done.

I took her hand, "God bless you both, my dear."

She was wistful, "You are such a nice, old-fashioned sort of person, Jerry. Nobody but you ever speaks to me of God——"

"My father is a parson—perhaps that's why I do it."

"I think you'd do it anyhow."

We sat there in silence while a gaudy bird on a perch near us ducked his head in a sort of mad little dance, which seemed to match the mood of the dancers in the room beyond.

Before we went back to the others, Bernice made me promise not to let Lionel know that she had spoken of their marriage. "It just slipped out, Jerry. And you are so comfortable to confide in."

I saw her later dancing with Lionel—her face was raised to his, and its radiance swept it clear of doubts.

3

My second dance with Mimi came just before midnight, and it was then we had our chance to talk. That we might be absolutely alone, we fled to the Turkish Retreat, where Mimi sat like a rose among the puffy and gold cushions, and where one of Olga's awful screens hid us from any wandering guests who might drift into the room.

"What did your mother mean by saying that the danger was over?" I demanded.

"She thinks I am going to marry Andy."

"What makes her think it?"

She flashed a challenging glance, "Andy thinks so, too."

I stood over her. "But you're not. Oh, you couldn't do a thing like that, Mimi?"

"Why couldn't I? Jerry, listen. What other way is there out of it? I don't love him as I might—love you. But it isn't possible for me to marry you. It won't be possible for years. You mustn't think that I don't want romance. It was heavenly up there in Maine . . . You made me feel like the little girl I used to be . . . But I've got to be sensible. Mother and I can't go on this way. In spite of everything everybody has done for us, our bills are appalling. If I don't marry soon, I don't know what will happen to us. I can't work. And you wouldn't want me to, would you, Jerry?"

All rosy tulle and silver butterflies, who could link her with the thought of drudgery? Yet I said, "I'd rather have you work your fingers to the bone than marry a man you did not love."

She blazed, "Do you call that caring? If you cared, Jerry, you wouldn't want hard things to touch me."

I had ready for her my father's stern philosophy, "It isn't the hard things that hurt us."

"Oh, do you really believe that?" she flung back at me, "do you think I'd be happy for one minute in ugly surroundings?"

She had me there. I could not see her in any setting but that of enchantment. I could not see her as anything but silken and shining.

But I stuck to my point, "You won't be happy with Andy."

"One side of me will. There are two Mimis, Jerry, the one I might be if it were possible for us to go on together, and the one I shall be if I marry Andy. I shall be happy in having lovely things, and social success——"

"Dead sea apples," said my father's son.

She sat there looking up at me with lovely wistful eyes, and I found myself saying, "If it were possible for you to marry me, would you be glad, Mimi?"

"It would be—all that I have dreamed, Jerry."

I caught her hands in mine and drew her up from the cushions, "Mimi, perhaps if we dream hard enough——?"

She escaped from me and perched herself on the arm of a chair at some distance, "We mustn't be silly—Jerry."

I was reckless, filled with the thought of the revelation which was to come to her before the evening was over. "Mimi, you say that I mean more to you than Andy. Prove it."

"How?"

"Give me two of his dances tonight——"

Her breath came quick— "But he'd be furious."

"Who cares?"

I could see that she shared my excitement. That to some extent I dominated her. "Say that you

will," I insisted, yet was surprised when she yielded.

My remembrance of the rest of that night is of an excitement which drove me on and on madly. I danced with one girl after another, girls in pink and girls in blue and girls in green, girls in silver gowns and gowns of gold, but for all I cared for any of them their faces might have been blank masks which made them all alike. Their words were a meaningless jumble, their coquetry was a thing to be met with a mechanical show of gallantry.

It was only the dances with Mimi which counted —the ones I had stolen from Andy!

Oh, the youth of it, and the triumph. I gloried in Andy's black looks—in the knowledge that it was I who could play on the keys of Mimi's nature. What was he with all of his money? It was not he who drew Mimi, but I—Jerry Chandler, country-boy and son of a parson!

At supper, Olga's planning had placed me at the debutantes' table, with Mimi opposite me. My blood ran wildly, I found myself the gayest of the gay, making a ringing speech when toasts were drunk, winning tumultuous applause.

Lighted by that inner fire, I drew the eyes of people who did not know me. My cheeks were red and my eyes bright because of Mimi. My wit sparkled because of Mimi. I had no vanity, no

conceit of myself—this was my hour, the hour she had given me—there was the hope, too, in my heart, that there were many other hours in the future which we would share together.

4

The supreme moment came at last when Olga and Mimi and I met in the old library—a picture to carry through the years that followed—Mimi's beauty, Olga's opulent loveliness, my own ecstatic youth.

The library had been untouched since the Senator's death, and retained much of the dignity which the rest of the house had lost. Over the mantel was a portrait of Mimi's grandmother. This had not been taken down when Olga had come to reign as mistress. The portrait had been painted when the Senator's first wife was a bride—it had everything that Olga lacked, the delicate poise, the distinction, the pride of bearing.

Yet, there was about Olga a certain attractive reposefulness as she sat by the heavy table, with the light from a massive copper dome falling upon her, setting the diamonds which she wore in her hair ablaze.

She plunged at once into the thing she had to say, "I asked you to come, Mimi, because I have something important to talk over with you and Jerry."

Mimi's smile was charming. "It sounds delightfully interesting, Olga."

"I think it will be." Then in a crisp and business-like manner she stated the case; for a long time she had been thinking she would like to do what she was sure her husband would have been glad to have her do. She had money enough and to spare, it would be perfectly possible for her to share it without any hardship to herself.

She ended this preamble with, "I want you to have some of it, Mimi."

I was aware of Mimi's complete amazement. "Do you mean that you are giving me a part of grandfather's money?"

"Yes."

"But—how dear of you, Olga."

I wish I could make you see her as I saw her then, leaning a little towards Olga, her bare arms as white as milk against the dark wood of the table, her eyes lighted. "Are you giving Lion his share, too?" she asked.

"No."

Mimi was frankly puzzled, "Why should I have it if he doesn't?"

Olga flushed. "It is enough, isn't it, if I give it to one of you? I like you better than I do the rest, Mimi. And I want you to marry Jerry."

I saw Mimi's hands open and shut in a tense

movement. "What has my marrying Jerry to do with it?"

"I am giving it to you to make your marriage with him possible."

"And it isn't to be mine, unless I marry him?"

"No."

In the dead silence which followed I knew that the thing was done for—Olga's bluntness, Mimi's pride—the two would no more mix than oil and water.

Mimi turned towards me—"Did you know this, Jerry?"

"Yes."

"And you were—willing?"

"Not at first. But there didn't seem to be any other way out."

She stood up. "Oh," she said, "did you think this was a way out? That I should take, as a gift from Olga, that which belongs to me—the money that grandfather meant me to have—so that you might live on it?"

Scorn in every line of her, in her stormy eyes, in her highheld head. So might some small duchess far back in her family line have arraigned a lout who had insulted her.

But I had my pride, too. "You can take that back," I said, "you know it isn't true. I don't want Olga's money. I don't want anybody's money. I

want you. I'd want you if I had to live in an attic for the rest of my life."

She was white. "Oh, I wish you'd stop talking of attics,—I hate them——. And I meant what I said. I won't take anything back——"

We faced each other, stormy eye meeting stormy eye. "This is the end then——" I told her. "No man could stand a thing like that and keep his self-respect."

She flung up her hand in a gesture of disdain. "It should have been the end long ago," and before we could speak or try to stop her, she swept her radiant presence from the room and left it dark.

Neither Olga nor I spoke for several moments. Then Olga said gloomily, "Well, we've made a mess of it. But I must say that I tried to do my best for both of you."

I could see that she was hurt, thrown back upon herself, and I was sorry. "You have been more than kind, Olga," I said, "I must seem to you ungrateful, but I'm not."

"All I can say is that you are both very foolish, Jerry. Such a chance may not come your way again . . . " she rose and stood by the table, "you mustn't think that this will make any difference in my feeling for you . . . And as I told you, I'll be glad to let you have some money any time you need it."

"I couldn't take it. Thanks, just the same."

"But what will you do?"

"My father wants me at home for Christmas."

"And after that?"

"God knows."

She had to leave me then and go back to her guests. I stayed in the library alone. My hopes were shattered, my dreams gone. After a long time I realized that Olga's guests were departing. From behind the curtain of one of the long windows I watched them go. There was a tunnel of striped canvas covering the steps and terrace. The figures which emerged from the end of the tunnel were visible only for a fleeting moment before they stepped into their waiting motors. I had thus a glimpse of Mimi and Andy bending above her. The light shone on her russet hair—and they drove away together.

CHAPTER VIII.

1

The next day I started back to my old home. It snowed all the afternoon, and through the night, and the flakes, falling steadily, seemed to bury my dead hopes.

My father met me at the station, his little mare hitched to a small sleigh. As we rode along, the jingle of the bells made a cheerful accompaniment to our conversation.

But I was not cheerful. My mood was melancholy. I at once poured my story into my father's sympathetic ears. "I've lost her."

"You can't be sure of that, Jerry"

"I am sure."

"Youth is always final. It may be only the first act. Tomorrow the curtain may go up, and you'll see the rest of the play."

In spite of my pessimism, I found myself warmed by a faint hope. He was so wise, so steadfast, I was soothed and sustained by the strength that was in him.

I tried to tell him how I felt. His response had a touch of deep emotion. "I am glad you came to me, my boy. I can't tell you how I have missed you." And I knew, even as he said it, that what he

had missed was not merely my physical presence, but the spiritual communion, the meeting of mind and soul and heart.

We came to the little house at dusk, and the lights shone out in a blur of orange against the snowy background. As we entered the little sitting-room, I was aware of Aunt Mary's taste in the changes which had been made. There was the twinkle of old brasses in front of the open fire, a Paisley shawl thrown over the couch gave a touch of mellow color, there were holly berries in a dull green vase, two comfortable black cats were silhouetted against the blaze.

The table was spread in the sitting-room, because the new heating plant had not yet been installed, and the dining-room was too cold. My grandmother sat in my mother's place, and my father said his simple grace. Aunt Mary was opposite me, and surveyed me with a beaming countenance.

It was good to be there with the three of them, to feel their affection and their delight in my presence. I was hungry, too, after my long abstinence, for I had eaten nothing on the train, and I was glad of the hearty food. Remembering my tastes, Aunt Mary had provided creamed codfish and baked potatoes, and there was a rich dark cake with fruit in it, soda-biscuits with hot maple syrup to eat on them, and a great dish of cottage cheese.

I thought of the feast at Olga's,—only one night

between. People of two worlds! What would Mimi think of this? Would she shudder and draw back? *"I hate attics,"* echoed in my ears. Would she see the homely charm of my father's house, the warmth, the light, the loveliness of that simple grace?

Aunt Mary's eager questions drew me out.

I told them something of the ball.

"And did you dance, Jerry?" my grandmother asked.

"Of course he danced, Mother," Aunt Mary said, "why shouldn't he?"

"Well, you never danced, Mary, nor Stephen."

Across the table I saw my father's glance meet Aunt Mary's. And their eyes danced as their feet might have done had they been brought up under less severe discipline.

I told them about the banquet—of ices frozen in pink-rose forms, of rose-wreathed hats of spun sugar filled with bonbons, of salads served in pink paper cases, of lobster cooked with sherry, of oysters in pastry shells.

"It is all like a fairy-tale," sighed Aunt Mary. "I should think this house would seem cramped and commonplace."

"I am glad to be here," I said with sincerity, "all of that life is hollow, artificial, I hate it."

She gave me a shrewd glance. She guessed, I think, the truth, that I had not found the life in

St. Louis hollow and hateful until something had gone wrong with it for me.

When it was time for bed, my father showed me to my old room. It seemed to have shrunk in the time I had been away, and I missed the comforts of the great hotel—my bath, the warmth, the electric lighting. Yet I was glad of the silence and old associations—the little house seemed wrapped in peace. Before we separated for the night my father read from his shabby Bible, and in his prayer gave thanks for the return of his son.

When at last I was ready for bed, I opened my window wide to the night. I felt, now and then, a snow-flake blow in, but I was covered up to my ears by the great quilts which my mother had made, and by a blanket which her own mother had woven. I liked the crisp coolness of the air in my face, and hoped that it might make me sleep. But my eyes would not shut—all the deadness and dullness which had weighed me down as I had travelled in the train flared up now in burning agony.

Mimi, Mimi, Mimi—was the unceasing reiteration—I had lost her, lost her, lost her . . . the wind seemed to howl it as it swept around the corners. I fought against a rising storm of emotion. I shook with dry sobs. At last the tears came. I lay there gripped by the awful despair of youth, which sees no hope ahead.

I do not know how long this mood lasted, but I

was roused by a faint whirring sound. As I raised myself to listen, there was the tingling touch of cold fur against my hand. One of the black pussy-cats had found my open window and had sought shelter.

I lifted the edge of the upper quilt and she curled down in the warmth. Then she sang—a comforting, soothing song—it swept me back to my childhood when the grandmother of this very kitten had kept me company.

The howl of the wind died down, the whirring song ceased . . . and when I waked, the sky was clear and the sun shining.

2

I learned that my father and Aunt Mary were making many plans for Christmas. There was to be a tree in our barn, and the children of the church would go from house to house singing carols. I had never had a tree as a child. My mother had preserved the Puritan tradition. But my father and Aunt Mary were two of a kind. They felt that one might be good and merry. Sadness was not necessarily a sign of saintliness.

They had included me in their plans. I was to be the Shepherd who first saw the Star, coming in with a lamb in my arms to tell the glad tidings. I was, too, to lead the little carollers from house to house.

As time went on, I found myself living two lives,

an outer one in which I shared in the affairs and interests of the people of the parsonage, and an inner one in which I talked continually to Mimi, explaining my point of view, accusing, excusing, coming in the end to no conclusions, held back by my pride from writing to her, yet having moments when it seemed as if pride were nothing, and that love were the only thing.

So the weeks passed. Three of them. I did some writing in my father's little study in the church which he had occupied since my grandmother and aunt had been a part of his household. I worked there mornings, while he made his calls, and he occupied the study in the afternoon. We shared the tasks about the farm, and I must confess that there was something comforting to me in the serene animal life, the plump and confiding cows, the friendly little mare, the eager old watch-dog, the affectionate pussy-cats.

I fed the chickens and the pigeons, tossed great forkfuls of hay and straw into the stalls, cleaned the snow from the walks, wore my old clothes, and came in ravenous, three times a day, to Aunt Mary's good meals.

I would sit in the kitchen and watch her cook. There were pre-Christmas preparations, and I helped her seed the raisins and chop the nuts. At night we popped corn on the hearth and sometimes made taffy.

Aunt Mary had the type of domesticity which makes a home of any house. Mentally keen, well-read, alert, she did not scorn the physical tasks which contributed to the order and beauty of her abode. It was this quality in her which helped me to sway level. She kept me busy, and I liked the busyness. I must confess that I went often very reluctantly to my writing, dreading the loneliness.

My father's study was a plain little place, warmed by a tight drum stove, in which wood had to be poked at regular intervals. There was a table on which stood my rented typewriter, and there were cases for my father's books. The window framed a vista of snowladen trees, backed by the bright sapphire of the lake.

The books in the cases were not all theological ones. There were the poets in blue and crimson and gold bindings. I read Browning, I remember, with new eyes. One had to live and suffer, I decided, to understand his "Men and Women." And I had lived and suffered.

There was a door leading from the study into the church. Now and then, torn by dark thoughts, I would go into the church, and pace the aisles in the icy air. Sometimes I threw myself on my knees, trying to believe that God was in this holy place and that He would help me.

Because, perhaps, genius is born of travail, I

wrote a story which seemed to me strong. I read it to my father

"It has depth," he told me.

"I have lived and loved," I said, gloomily aware of my dramatic kinship to all the tragic artists of the ages.

It was a part of my father's charm that he could look below the surface of my boyish affectations and see my real agony of mind.

"Perhaps, dear boy, this is your high moment. People who live at their ease very rarely achieve."

"But I want happiness, Father."

"You will find it when you least expect it."

I wanted happiness then and there. I had a feeling that youth might fly from me if I waited, and I should be left old and lacking capacity to enjoy. If I could not have Mimi, I would have no one. So the years stretched ahead of me—empty.

3

There were moments, however, when I felt very young indeed. I found, in the Christmas rehearsals, a rollicking, picturesque quality which was almost Elizabethan. Observing my small carollers, I wondered whether, after all, the modern world might not be returning to the red-blooded Christianity of older times. And whether it might not

be actually more spiritual in its results than the attenuated philosophies of the present day.

However that might be, the little folks in their bright sweaters, with bits of holly stuck in the stocking caps, were like something out of the illustrations in my old nursery-rhyme books. They played pranks on each other, piped their merry tunes, and gave me a sort of worshipful admiration which warmed my sore heart.

"You are a perfect Pied Piper, Jerry," my Aunt Mary told me, "you have the children hypnotized."

I had heard, while in St. Louis, some old French carols—*"Un flambeau, Jeanette, Isabella," "Quand Dieu naquit a Noel," "A minuit fut fait un reveil,"* and others. I found English translations, and taught them to the children. On Christmas Eve I led them from house to house.

"Bring a torch, Jeanette, Isabelle,
Bring a torch to the cradle run!
It is Jesus, good folk of the village,
Christ is born and Mary calling,
Ah, beautiful is the Mother,
Ah, beautiful is her Son!"

We sang this in front of one hospitable mansion, where we were asked to stop and have refreshments. As I came with my little band into the dining-room, I knew I was much observed. I had on a green sweater, and my green cap was in my hand. I saw in a mirror as I passed that my cheeks were

very red, and that my ruffled hair gave out deep gold lights. I was handsome and I knew it. I wished that Mimi might see me in this new aspect. I wished that she might be with us, drinking hot chocolate and eating frosted cakes. I had a feeling that she would like it, and that her radiance would shine out here as it had never shone, even on that last night in the rosy ballroom.

Out under the stars again . . . *"When at Christmas Christ was born, In Far Palestine, all observed that solemn day. With a joy divine . . . There was neither churl nor king, Who did not a present bring . . ."*

I let the others go on ahead of me, singing. Above me the sky was illumined by an effable brightness . . . Midnight was not far away. Centuries ago on such a night a great miracle had been wrought.

But the day of miracles was over. Men prayed, and there was no response. In my three weeks of agony I had asked that some word might come to me from Mimi.

One of my small carollers came back to me. "Why aren't you singing, Jerry?"

I lifted her in my arms—she was such a tiny thing—and put her on my shoulder. "You sing for me. You are so high up, they will think I am singing."

Her little arm was around my neck . . .

"There was one who gave a lamb,
With his heart and soul,
And another brought some milk,
In a little bowl.
One beneath his smock, 'tis said,
Brought a humble gift of bread . . . "

She stopped her thin piping long enough to say, "You sing, too, Jerry."

But I could not. I felt that my voice would break . . . as my heart was broken. I wanted Mimi.

The midnight celebration in our barn was a great success. We had the Wise Men, the Shepherds—the Manger . . . I came in with the lamb under my arm, and said that I had seen the angels, and had heard their voices . . .

People of two worlds! I wondered how Mimi was spending her Christmas Eve. And Andy and the rest of them. I wondered what they would have thought of me with the lamb under my arm, and whether any one among them spoke of Mary or the Wise Men. And would I, if I had been among them, have spoken of these sacred things? And was it, after all, with me, merely a matter of environment?

After it was over, Aunt Mary and I walked back to the house together. My father was driving home a sleighful of children.

As we came into the sitting-room, Aunt Mary

said, "There's some mail for you on the kitchen table, Jerry. One of the neighbors went to the post-office."

She sat by the fire while I looked over the envelopes. I found a letter from Lionel! The rest seemed to be Christmas cards—many of them with the St. Louis postmark. My heart seemed suddenly to stop beating as I saw Mimi's angular individual script.

She had sent me a card—and across one corner she had scrawled, "I am sorry, Jerry. Let's be friends."

And out there in the night I had said there were no miracles!

I laughed aloud and Aunt Mary turned and looked at me. "Something pleasant?"

With the card in my hand I flung myself on the floor beside her. "Aunt Mary," I asked, "were you ever in love?"

"A long time ago, Jerry."

"Then you know what this means to me—" I thrust the card into her hands. "I thought the thing was all ended. And now you see what she says."

She read the scrawled words and smiled down at me. "And it has made you happy?"

"I could shout it from the housetops," I hugged my knees. "If you only knew how adorable she is."

"I can guess," she replied.

Sitting there by the fire, I told her of Mimi—her beauty, her pride, the peacock colors that she wore. "She is different from any one else. And if I had half a chance I could win her. She has been used to luxury, but Father says if she really cared that wouldn't count."

"Your father is a dreamer, Jerry."

I said, sharply, "You mean that luxury does count?"

"With such a woman? Yes. She is what her life has made her. It would be an experiment to transplant her. Only a great passion would make it possible . . . "

"Some day I'll make her care enough to do it."

"How can you make her?"

"Aunt Mary, when I am with her, I dominate her. And Uncle Jerry says it is masterfulness that wins."

"Perhaps it wins. But does it hold?"

"If I can win her, I can keep her," I said doggedly.

"Don't be too sure. Women are strange creatures."

I stared in the fire. "Father says if you hold the soul of a woman in your hand . . . "

She breathed a soft sigh. "That sounds like him. And it is true. But men don't know it. The men

who look for the spiritual quality in their wives are the successful husbands."

"I am not sure," I said, "that I want to be a successful husband—I want to be a mad lover——"

"Romance, Jerry? Well, I hope you'll have it. I missed it because I tried to be sensible. Perhaps it would have been sensible to grasp it while it was in my hand. But my mother advised me, and I thought she was wise. Perhaps she was, who knows?"

She sat looking into the fire, a little smile on her lips, but I was sure she was not smiling in her heart.

4

With the rest of the mail unopened, I went upstairs to write a letter to Mimi. I could not wait —I wanted to pour out my heart to her.

The room was cold, so I wrapped myself in a warm robe, set my lamp on my little table, and propped Mimi's card against it—it was a charming thing, illumined in her colors, green and blue and copper.

I wrote pages which I tore up, I wrote other pages which I copied. It was not to be, I had decided, a love letter. Mimi had asked for my friendship. I would assure her of its eternal quality. I would be her friend though the heavens fell. It took twelve sheets in which to tell her!

I heard my father come in. He and Aunt Mary talked for a time and then the house was silent.

And in that silence, I read, at last, Lionel's letter. I had not heard from him or from Bernice since I left St. Louis, although I had written them.

He said that things were not going as well with him and Bernice as he had hoped. Mrs. Barry had forgiven them, and Mr. Barry was making them a small allowance. He had not been willing, he had told his daughter, to entirely support her husband. "He doesn't realize," Lionel complained, "that a little help now would do the trick."

He wanted me to come back. He and Bernice were to leave the hotel, where they had been staying since their honeymoon, and to take an apartment. They would be glad to let me have a room, and he and I could go on with our work. "I need you to tell me I can do it, Jerry. We are a bit hard up, but we are not regretting our marriage. The game is worth the candle, and having Bernice is greater luck than I deserve."

"We are all expecting the news of Mimi's engagement to Fuller. He is rushing her no end. So far she has held him off. But you know how her mother feels about it, so it is probably only a question of time. She called me up this morning to ask your address so I fancy you'll be hearing from her. I wish you had Andy's money, old chap. I'd tell you to go to it, and cut him out."

Money, *money,* MONEY! I had none to lay at the feet of the woman I loved. And of what use to dally with a friendship which must end with her marriage to another? Why should she torture me with the offer of it? To see me flutter like a butterfly on a pin?

I tore the letter which I had written her into bits. I opened the window and flung the scraps of paper out into the night—they went whirling off on the wings of the wind. The wind, too, buffeted me, and blew the hair back from my face. Yet I did not feel it. The only thing I felt was the sharp stab of the thought that friendship with Mimi would be futile—I wanted more than that—I should always want more.

So my answer to her overture was silence. I know now that it was the most potent reply I could have made. Had my letter gone to her, she would have rested in the certainty that I was hers forever. Failing that assurance, she thought of me, wondered, made Andy no promises.

I wrote to Lionel, and told him I was doing good work, and should stay with my father. I sent news later of the acceptance of my story. I hoped that he might pass the news of my little triumph on to Mimi. But I did not ask him to do it.

I wrote, too, to Olga. But got little satisfaction from her. She had not the pen of a ready writer, and I felt, sensitively, that she resented that scene

in the library, when she had hoped to play Lady Bountiful and had had her gift flung back in her face.

So the life in the old city on the Mississippi gradually receded. I found myself entering into the activities of our small community. I took charge of the church music, organized a children's choir, and rehearsed a pageant which would take place in the summer and would give something of the picturesque history of our township.

Thus the days passed. I was unhappy, but my unhappiness was tempered by the knowledge of my growing powers. And in a sense the life was satisfying. It was so stable. So free from the irritating excitements. It was as serene as the lake which stretched out to far horizons, it was as aspiring as the high heavens which arched above us.

It was in March that the spring began to come to the country-side. The snow melted and left wet patches of brown earth, the mornings glimmered with a new brightness, there was a golden haze at dusk instead of the sharp clearness of winter sunsets.

Then came April, burgeoning and blooming, with daffodils in the garden and the orchards pink and white; with lambs, and little chickens, and the nesting birds. May, with strawberries in great blue bowls on our breakfast table, and peonies in rose and crimson masses along the edges of our

stone walk. Soft winds blew over the fields and fluttered a thousand leaves of green and silver. Our great lake was a sheet of azure with clouds like puffs of thistledown.

My father and I, in our walks in the spring twilight, often went to the lake. I was writing a story about it, only, in my story, the lake was the sea, and my hero, with a buccaneering spirit, which I felt transcended my own timidities, carried the heroine off against her will in a very modern ship.

I outlined the plot to my father. "That is what I ought to do—carry Mimi off."

"But—failing a ship, Jerry?" he was smiling.

I felt that it was not a smiling matter. "I might carry her off anyhow."

"Modern life isn't like that."

"Why shouldn't it be?"

"It is too complex."

"It remains then for somebody to simplify it."

"And you want to be a pioneer, Jerry?"

"Why not? Why shouldn't a man find new worlds right here in the midst of our civilization? Why doesn't somebody write about it? Why doesn't somebody say, 'Here is fresh spiritual soil,' just as our adventuring grandfathers said, 'Here is land for us to make ours?' Father, there are new countries in the midst of crowded communities," my thought was not quite clear, but I got it at last. "I

mean if some strong souls would say, 'Let us strip life of its complexities.'"

"People have tried it."

"Well, they can try again. I am going to write about it."

"Good. You may be a preacher yet, Jerry."

I weighed this seriously. It showed the change in me that I should feel there might be a call to me not unlike that which had come to my father. I might sway a larger world . . . !

Then all in a moment everything that the winter had brought to me was swept away. I came home late one night from my choir practice. We had rehearsed the pageant, and I was proud of my work, and had walked under the spring moon with a quickened sense of all I had achieved, tinged with an exquisite melancholy of my memories of Mimi.

When I arrived at the house every one was in bed. My letters were on the table. I read them standing by the sitting-room lamp. The last one I opened was in a long legal envelope, and there were papers enclosed. The letter was from a Denver lawyer, and told me of my Uncle Jerry's death. I was, he informed me, my uncle's sole heir. The papers had to do with my inheritance!

5

When I read the lawyer's letter a second time I went into my father's room. I had the lamp in my

hand, and the light waked him. He sat up at once, looking rather young and boyish with his ruffled hair and open collar.

"What is it, Jerry?"

"Father, I shouldn't have waked you, but I wanted you to see this."

I held out the letter to him, then, conscious for the first time of the shock it might be, I stammered, "It is very bad news of Uncle Jerry."

"Is he dead?"

"Yes, father."

"Let me see the letter."

I gave it to him. So absorbed was I by the vista which was revealed to me by my inheritance that I could not grasp, at the moment, the tragic significance of the statements which must have struck my father like a blow. Uncle Jerry had died alone in a hospital. He had been suffering for several years from an acute trouble. He had asked to be buried on the side of the mountain above his ranch. He had left me, because I was his namesake, his house, and all properties, real and personal, of which he died possessed. The lawyer enclosed a copy of the will. He was not sure, he explained, how much income I would receive. Uncle Jerry's affairs were somewhat complicated. He thought the house was free from mortgages. He would let me know as soon as possible.

When my father had read it all, he got out of

bed. "We can't talk here. Our voices will disturb your aunt and grandmother. I'll dress and come to you, Jerry."

When he came, we left the house and walked under the moon. And as we walked we talked of Uncle Jerry.

"This will be a sad blow to Mother and Mary," my father said. "Jerry went out of their lives long ago. But they will mourn the boy he used to be."

"Somehow it doesn't seem fair that he should leave everything to me, Father."

"He talked that over with us when he was here. We wanted him to do it. He could give you the opportunities which none of the rest of us could give."

For the first time I had a feeling that Uncle Jerry's legacy tied me to something, that it placed on me a certain responsibility for success, lest I disappoint those who had sacrificed so much.

I tried to explain this feeling to my father. We had come to the little cemetery, and stood leaning on the gate. We could see the white shaft of the stone which marked my mother's grave. She was often thus a part of our councils.

"I wanted," I said at last, "to be free."

"You are free, Jerry."

"No," I said, "I am not. The right thing for me to do would be to stay here and work, and fulfill all your ambitions for me, and Aunt Mary's

and grandmother's. But I don't want to do that. I want to live, father. I want to live."

He did not speak for several moments, then he said: "Just what do you mean by living?"

I faced him in the moonlight. "Well," I said, "I want something more vivid than life has brought you. I want color and glow . . . as you wanted it once upon a time . . . I want to feel, to the last quiver of sensation . . . I want to seek and adventure . . . like the man in my story . . ."

"When we are young, we want all those things, Jerry."

"Don't you want them now, Father? Don't you?"

"Perhaps," he said, "but since I shall never have them, I am content."

"But if you were young again?"

"I don't know, Jerry. Honestly, I don't know. I chose what seemed best."

"But for me, Father? If I marry Mimi . . ."

"You are thinking of that?"

"Of course. I have something now to offer her. I am going back to St. Louis. I shall make her see what life can give us out there on Uncle Jerry's ranch."

"What do you know of life on his ranch?"

"The things he told me."

"You mustn't depend too much on that—" he checked himself, unlatched the gate and went in. I followed him and we made our way among the

stones until we came to a flat one like a bench where Theresa and I had sat years before. There were roses blooming as there had been then; they showed like small white ghosts against their dark foliage. The wind had come up, and the moon drifted in a sea of clouds. It cast spectral shadows over the headstones. And there I stood, young, red-blooded, urging my claims to a quick and stirring future.

"Your Uncle Jerry," my father was saying, "saw everything through the eyes of his own optimism. He loved life, and he grasped at every experience that came to him. I am not sure that it paid. I should not like to think that you must lose so much to get so little. The chances are, Jerry, that his ranch is not luxurious, and that your income will be small. I should advise you to go out there and see what you have to offer before you ask a woman to share it."

"But why wait . . . ? It may be too late."

"Too late?"

"She may be—married. I can only hope . . . Father, I've got to go to her."

A cloud was over the moon; his voice came to me out of the darkness: "Go if you will, and God go with you."

I thought him wonderful then. I still think him wonderful that in spite of his doubts, in spite of his wish to warn me, he should yet feel that my

own adventure was mine, and he would not hold me back.

Yet, I know my selfishness. I had no thought of his loneliness. I was lost to all sense of his double bereavement in the death of his brother and in the desertion of his son. I was filled with the exquisiteness of hope. I was drunk with the fragrance of the roses, and the beauty of the high-sailing moon. My inheritance made all things possible, and I was going back to Mimi.

CHAPTER IX.

1

I married Mimi Le Brun just twenty-four hours after I arrived in St. Louis. The thing, as I look back upon it, seems incredible. It is hard even now to recall the moves in the game I played. For it was a game, with the highest stakes in the world —my own future and Mimi's.

I had written to her—a short note—telling her it was imperative I should see her. And that I would call her up as soon as I reached St. Louis.

"I ought not to speak to you, Jerry," was the first thing she said to me over the telephone, "after the way you have treated me."

I ignored that. "May I come now? I can't wait."

"Not until one o'clock. Mother has a luncheon engagement, and she will be out by that time."

"Can't you lunch somewhere with me?"

"No. I have a seamstress working for me—and anyhow I am not quite sure that I have forgiven you, Jerry."

But I knew that she would forgive me. I would admit no thought of failure.

My train had arrived at eleven-thirty. I went to a downtown hotel, made myself spick and span, and found a florist. I bought an armful of roses,

paying an unspeakable price for them, but I felt that my prospects justified the extravagance. I had saved the money I had received for my story, and after paying my debts there had been two months' accumulated allowance. This would serve for immediate needs, and there was affluence ahead of me.

As I left the florist's it began to rain, a June shower, with a wild bit of wind at the beginning and then a heavy downpour. I took a taxi and reached Mimi's at the appointed time.

She was not in the little living room to receive me. So I sat on one of the chintz-covered chairs, with the box of flowers on the table beside me, while the maid went to announce me.

As I sat there, the silence was broken by a faint ticking sound in the room beyond. It stopped and began again, speeding up until the air was filled with the humming vibration.

It was the seamstress, of whom Mimi had spoken, at her sewing machine. Presently the noise ceased, and from behind the curtains, which separated the living-room from the dining-room, appeared the charming little Frenchwoman, Lucille Merrick, who had once sent Mimi and me on a quest for spools of blue silk.

She came forward and spoke with a sort of smiling breathlessness. "I must say something to you before you see Mimi. She has just had a fitting and

is getting dressed. When you see her you will be shocked. She has suffered. Her mother and Andy Fuller are like wolves—tearing her."

She was very much in earnest. "They are trying to make her marry him. Next week they are all going together to a house party on Lake Michigan. And Mimi doesn't want to go. She told me so just now. And she cried."

Mimi in tears! I couldn't believe it. Yet my heart leaped. "I have come to save her," I said.

She clasped her hands. "Do you think you can do it?"

"I know I can. Things have happened which make it possible."

Her wise eyes studied me for a moment, then she said, "Do I dare tell you something?"

I looked down at her, "Please."

"She loves you. But she loves her world. And you must be stronger than her world, stronger than herself. Don't let her get away from you. She has talked to me. She has told me nothing in words. But I have looked beneath the words. She would have married Andy if it had not been for you."

"You are sure?" My pulses were pounding.

She nodded. "You must never let her know I have spoken of it . . ." She made a quick movement towards the other room. "Would you like to see her pretty dresses?"

We were just in time, for when Mimi entered, a second later, Mrs. Merrick was holding up a crisp gown of apple-green and saying, "It is to have a silver sash."

Silver sash . . . silver rain . . . a golden world . . . Mimi with shadows under her eyes trying to say in an unconcerned fashion, "It was too bad to keep you waiting, Jerry."

I caught her hands in mine. "Don't you know I'd wait for a thousand years?"

She was obviously self-conscious. She turned a little toward Mrs. Merrick. "Aunt Lucille, were you showing him my pretty things?"

But Mrs. Merrick had disappeared as suddenly as if an earthquake had swallowed her up. There was a swinging door which led to the kitchen, and she must have used that, but the thing had the effect of her being taken up in a cloud or removed by some other miraculous means of transportation.

Mimi and I stood, a little apart, looking at each other, and the things that Mrs. Merrick had told me gave me courage.

"Mimi," I said, "are you glad to see me; are you?"

I knew she was glad. And I took her in my arms, wondering a little at my temerity. She clung to me; hid her face against my coat. She was crying.

I smoothed her hair. "Don't," I said, "my dearest."

But she cried on in a heart-broken way, and at last she said, "It has been dreadful . . . with everybody wanting to marry me . . . and I don't want to marry anybody . . . "

"Yes," I said, "you do. You want to marry me."

"But I can't, Jerry. I don't want to be poor. I don't know how to be . . . and you haven't any money."

"Love doesn't think of money."

"Doesn't it?" wistfully. "But life is real. It isn't just romance. And we can't live on dreams ——?"

"Suppose I should tell you of a dream which can come true, Mimi? Of a long low house set in a circle of mountains? Of wide acres that are mine —of the days that we shall ride together, of the nights when a great fire will blaze on our hearth ——"

I delighted in the amazement with which she regarded me. "Did you say that it might come true, Jerry?"

"It is true, my darling. Uncle Jerry is dead, and everything that he had is mine . . . "

"Do you mean that you are—rich?"

"Not measured by such fortunes as Andy Fuller's. But there's the house and the land, and plenty of people on the place to do things for us. You'd be like a little queen, and I a king."

That was the way Uncle Jerry had pictured it,

so was I, after all, greatly to be blamed if I made her see it as a shining palace?

"We will be away from all this shallowness and hollowness . . . and I shall do big things because you are there . . . And we'll go East and see my plays produced, and have a taste of the world, but always we shall come back to our castle, to our own hearthstone. That's what marriage will mean to us, Mimi—love and each other. Home, and the two of us in it."

I was eloquent with all the passion of my youthful idealism. She listened, and at last I saw her touched by radiance of her decision to marry me.

"But it seems too wonderful to be true, Jerry."

"It is both true and wonderful."

2

My scheme as to how the thing might be done had been spectacular. I had seen myself flaunting the fact of my improved fortunes in the faces of Mimi's mother and of Andy Fuller. I had seen Mimi's world crowding the church while she came toward me up the aisle in all that bridal loveliness over which I had pondered as a boy. I had seen Andy, my defeated rival, glowering at me from among the shadows.

But Mimi destroyed at once my melodramatic illusions. "We must get the thing over before we tell anybody."

"Do you mean that it is to be—clandestine?"

She nodded. "I am not sure I like that word, but it is the only way."

"Why is it the only way?"

Her eyes were stormy. "I shall die if I have to fight for my happiness, Jerry."

That settled it for me. I would not have her hurt or troubled. And Mrs. Merrick had said that Andy and her mother were wolves.

It was Mrs. Merrick who helped us make our plans. We called her in and found her an enthusiastic fellow-conspirator.

"If I didn't trust you, Jerry," she told me at the beginning, "I couldn't do it. But I won't have Mimi sacrificed."

We decided it was best that no one should know of my having called on Mimi. I was even to carry the roses away with me, that all traces of my presence might be removed. The little maid was reticent, and masculine callers were too frequent to cause any comment. Mimi's trunk was to be packed and waiting when the expressman should arrive late that night. It was the maid's evening out, and Mimi and her mother were going to a dance at the Woman's Club. I would whisk Mimi away from the dance long enough to let the expressman in, and then whisk her back before she was missed. I had suggested that she content herself with a

bag and leave her trunks, but she was scornful. "I have a thousand things to take with me."

We were to be married at Mrs. Merrick's. We still had the hours of the afternoon to get the license. We had, I think, a sense of breathless hurry, as if something might happen if we delayed. Yet at my moment of leaving her, Mimi demanded: "What shall I do if I ever regret it, Jerry? How do I know that I'll be happy?"

"But you do know it, don't you?"

"I'm not sure."

"I'll make you sure. When you are mine—forever."

3

It was when I went to the club that night to call for Mimi that I had an encounter with Andy which threatened to spoil everything. It was raining so hard that I braved a possible recognition, and stood just within the awning that led up the steps to the big front door. My taxi moved on a bit to make way for a big car—and out of the car stepped Andy, tall and dark and with his conqueror's air, which I hated. He saw me and stopped like a shot.

"Chandler, when did you get back?"

"Today."

"Are you going in?"

"I am not invited."

He still lingered. "Are you waiting for some one?"

"Yes. For Mimi."

I would have said it if I had died for it. I had nothing to hide from him. She was mine. I would claim her before the world if she would let me. I forgot all of our well-laid plans. I forgot everything except the triumph of the moment. I stood shoulder to shoulder with him now in my changed fortunes. I towered high above him in my knowledge of the happiness which was to come to me.

I saw that he was puzzled. "She is not leaving so soon. I have a couple of dances with her."

"She will be back in time for them."

And now at the top of the steps at the end of that long tunnel of canvas we saw Mimi. She was wrapped to the ears in her splendid cloak, and her hair above it burned with a russet flame.

I was aware, as she came towards me, of her trepidation. I spoke at once. "I have told Fuller that you'll be back in time to dance with him."

She recovered herself, met his sullen eyes squarely, and said, "Isn't it a lovely night for a ride?"

"It's a perfect flood—Mimi. My car nearly floated. You are very foolish to go out in it."

"Am I? But I want to ride with Jerry—and he's going away tomorrow."

I saw a look of relief flash across his features.

For how could he know, poor fellow, that when I went Mimi would go with me?

Mimi passed him, and I helped her into the taxi. "If you don't smile before I come back, Andy," she said to him, "I shan't dance with you—" she waved her hand as we drove off. Then she turned to me and said sharply, "Jerry, he'll tell Mother you're here."

"I know. It was foolish of me to show myself. But if she ever asks questions, you can say as you said to Fuller, that I am going away tomorrow."

I was to hear later of that last heart-breaking argument between mother and daughter. Mrs. Le Brun came into Mimi's room when they returned from the dance, and taxed her with having seen me, with having offended Andy, with being heartless, with being selfish, with being ungrateful, with being cruel.

And Mimi had listened white-faced and had said, "You know how I hate Andy. Do you call it selfish to refuse to marry a man I don't love?"

"Mimi, love, as you call it, doesn't count after a few months. If you'll think of the happily married women we know, you'll find that they are the ones whose husbands make them comfortable. And you must stop this foolishness about Jerry."

"Oh, well, he's going away tomorrow, Mother."

"Where is he going?"

"West, to his uncle's ranch."

But she did not tell her that Uncle Jerry was dead, and that I was his heir; nor did her mother dream, when Mimi started out for a walk the next morning, that years would pass before they would meet.

4

We were married, as I have said, in Mrs. Merrick's old house. Most of it was rented to lodgers, but she had retained the long front room in the English basement, and had made a parlor of it, with her meals served at the other end on a shining square of dark mahogany. With the kitchen, and a bedroom on the floor above, she was very comfortable, and an old colored maid, Jinny, cooked for her, and prepared our wedding breakfast. One of Mrs. Merrick's lodgers was a clergyman. It was he who performed the ceremony and made the fourth at the breakfast.

The table was a drift of white flowers, and Mimi was all in white. As I looked at her it seemed as if the sacred rite, which I had shared with her, had changed us both in some mysterious way—*"With this ring . . . I thee wed . . . to have and to hold . . . from this day forward . . . for richer for poorer . . . as long as ye both shall live . . . "*

She was now, I felt, eternally mine; the ring I had put on her finger had a deathless significance.

It was at the moment of parting that Mrs. Merrick said to Mimi, "Remember, you are going to be happy, Cherie. And Jerry must remember that you and he are not a god and goddess on the peak of Mount Olympus. You'll find each other's faults. And you must love because of the faults as well as of the virtues."

Mimi clung to her. "You've been such a darling, Aunt Lucille. Some day you shall come and see our happiness . . . "

Then the taxi—the train. It seemed to me that I must wake from my dream and find myself alone and wanting Mimi. Yet, there she was in the seat beside me, a little low hat with a peacock's feather on her lovely head, the daughter of a proud race, yet with her pride submerged for the moment in her sense of romance, and in her faith in the future that my love had promised her.

And now we were in the midst of our great adventure. If Mimi had been adorable amid all the distractions of her own gay world, what shall I say of her when I had her to myself?

There are things, however, which cannot be spoken. I can tell only of my joy in the assurance she gave me of her devotion. "I love you because of your steadfastness, Jerry. Men never know what it means to a woman to find a lover who doesn't split his affections up into little bits. Strength and con-

stancy—these are the essentials—. It is so heavenly to rest in your care of me, Jerry."

I told her of my father's care of my mother. "I want to be like that," I said, "but you have something which my mother never had—and which my father missed—. His soul adventured, but hers did not."

There was a long silence after that, and then she said, "Jerry, I wonder, would you have loved my soul if I hadn't had a pretty face and stunning clothes?"

"I should have loved you in rags, Mimi."

"But how can I be sure, Jerry? How can any woman be sure?"

"Why ask questions, my dearest? When you are old and wrinkled and gray I shall still love you. Isn't that an answer?"

She shook her head. "I am afraid that isn't any answer. And I don't want to be old and wrinkled and gray, Jerry."

We were sitting by the window in our hotel in Denver. The air was as clear as wine, light and stimulating. Far off in the distance, billowing up like huge gray waves against the line of the horizon, was the mountain range which was our goal.

"Our mountains, Mimi," I said, "and in another day we shall be among them."

We were to motor from Denver. With fast driving, and by starting early, we could do it in a day.

I had considered buying a car. But an interview with Uncle Jerry's lawyer had revealed that there was practically no ready money at my disposal. The attorney repeated what he had said in his letter, that Uncle Jerry's affairs were involved. He would make me an advance if I wished, taking part of the ranch land as security.

I had had a sudden sense of foreboding. "Do you mean that there won't be any income?"

"I can't tell. But the ranch ought to yield fairly good crops. If you are anything of a practical farmer you should be able to work it."

I was immediately reassured. "My boyhood was spent on a farm."

"In the West?"

"In New York state."

"It isn't quite the same thing. But you may get away with it."

I saw myself riding over those wide acres—rounding up my cattle—. I said something of the kind, and saw his look of surprise. "There are no cattle. The free ranges are too limited in these days. The most profitable crop is alfalfa. And there are some experiments with small fruits—cherry orchards are beginning to pay fairly good returns. Your uncle, I believe, planted a lot of trees."

My imagination seized at once on the pictorial aspect of cherry orchards in bloom—of trees drip-

ping red fruit—. If I could not have cattle I would have cherries . . .

I wonder now that the attorney was not more definite in his discussion of the situation. But I fancy we were playing at cross-purposes. He did not know what I expected, hence, saw no reason to warn me. The income which might be made, he had judged, would be sufficient for the expenses of a modest young couple who went in for practical farming. How could his mind grasp, for a moment, the vision of the thing as I was seeing it—and as my Uncle Jerry had described it?

I am sure, however, that it would have been hard to shake my belief in the happiness which was ahead—youth, love, aspiration—my mind was hopeless of change, until on my arrival on the scene I was confronted by the truth.

We were to leave the next morning. I made arrangements for a hired car and went up to our rooms to find Mimi dressing for dinner. I told her about the cherry orchards—of the bloom of them, of the trees dripping red.

"Could anything be more beautiful?" I demanded.

"I like it much better than cows," she said. "I hate to think that things have to be killed."

We lingered, talking about it. Then she said, "You aren't dressed, Jerry, and I'm simply ravenous. Is it romantic to be hungry, dearest?"

"Fairy princesses can be anything," I assured her, "and get away with it."

She was to me, indeed, a fairy princess surrounded as she was at the moment by belongings which seemed to my crude, country-boy experience almost too exquisite for use. There were brushes of silver and bottles of crystal, a traveling case of fine leather, delicate laces, clinging silks and satins, little shoes which matched her gowns.

On everything, where it could be engraved or stamped or embroidered, was a peacock's feather.

I had asked her how it happened that she had chosen it. "One of my great-grandmothers had peacock feathers on her linen and on her silver. She owned an estate in France, and there were peacocks on the terrace, and she was so proud that she refused to marry a member of the royal family because he had plebeian blood in his veins.

"I am glad," I said to her, "that you are not like that."

"Why?"

"You wouldn't have married me."

"Perhaps she wasn't in love with him—" her blush was charming.

"You have an air, Jerry, as if you owned the world," she told me later, "and you are so awfully good-looking. Everybody stares at you in the dining-room."

But it was Mimi who drew their glances. There

was one man who recognized her and came to our table. "I left St. Louis yesterday," he said. "Your elopement is creating a great sensation."

We had seen the papers. And I told him so. Mimi's manner of carrying it off was charming. "It was my fault. I have always wanted to do something different. Jerry doesn't like clandestine things. But it was easier than the other—bridesmaids and a trousseau—and all the rest of it."

He laughed. "Andy is in mourning. I saw him just before I left. He was like a thundercloud."

When the man went on a few minutes later, neither he nor Mimi had mentioned Mrs. Le Brun. But the paper had said that Mimi's mother had treated the matter as the whim of a spoiled child. It was, we thought, rather sporting of her to put it as she did.

The effect was of there being no reason why Mimi should have run away. She might have been married at home. There would have been no opposition. I was my uncle's heir, and in every way eligible.

We had told her of my inheritance in a letter which we had mailed to her on the moment of departure. It had been a hard letter to write. We had left her, as it were, stranded on the shores of her ambitions. Yet the small income which she had from her husband's estate would be sufficient for her own needs when she had no daughter to

launch on the social seas. While I could not feel sorry for her, I promised myself that as soon as I knew something of my own finances I would make her an allowance.

Mimi's mind was not at rest. "I feel positively brutal, Jerry. Mother loves luxury, and I was her last hope."

I had no sympathy to spare. "Perhaps, she'll have time to think of some of the finer things," I said with a touch of smugness.

"What are the finer things?"

"Well, the love of money deadens people's souls."

"But one can't be civilized without it."

"It depends on what you mean by civilization, Mimi."

"Oh, having servants to keep things in order, and dressing for dinner, and plenty of bathtubs."

We laughed at that. "Some day," I promised her, "I'll take you into the mountains, miles away from bathtubs and dinner gowns, and I'll teach you the charms of the wild."

She shook her head. "I should love it," she said, "for a little while. But we couldn't live like that always, could we, Jerry?"

5

It was towards noon of the next day that we came to the great hills which rose higher and higher as we proceeded on our way.

Neither Mimi nor I had ever been among those Western mountains, so that our first view of the towering battlements of pink sandstone which guard the valleys gave us the feelings of entering enchanted ground. The man who drove our car told us the names of the various formations, but we knew them only as magic gateways to those higher peaks, silver-topped and touching the sky.

The roads as we left the highway were rough and narrow—little travelled. We passed through small settlements which were huddles of unlovely houses. Here and there we came upon crude hotels, where we stopped for meals, finding the food, as a rule, well-cooked and hearty, but served with a lack of formality which shocked Mimi's fastidiousness.

Yet she took it all rather easily. "It is like something in a book, Jerry. But I am glad our house will be different."

Looking back upon it, I wonder why doubts did not then assail me. But they did not. The splendor of the hills and of those shining peaks had woven a spell about me; I felt that I could ride on forever, with Mimi by my side.

Flowers were everywhere; pale columbines; faint mauve and white; harebells, trembling in the breeze; the exquisite and mystical Mariposa lily on its single stalk. Mimi exclaimed and I stopped the car and loaded her arms with them, and felt

that not even the lilies were lovelier than my young wife in her bridal happiness.

And now the shadows began to fall on the mountains, the valleys were dim—but the light stuck in a golden shaft across the great peak which towered ahead of us.

"About half way up that mountain is your house," the driver told us, "there ain't a better view anywhere."

My hand went over Mimi's. Her fingers curled themselves about mine in a quick understanding clasp. We leaned a little forward, trying to pierce the gloom.

The golden light faded, the mountain peak grew dark against a sea of silver sky on which floated a galleon of rosy cloud. Then the cloud sailed on, and the sky was faint amethyst with one breathless star.

So we came to our home at night. My imagination had seen it as we swept up to the door—the light streaming out; within a leaping fire, a groaning board, eager hands to help us!

My lawyer had told me that there were a half dozen laborers on the place, and the superintendent, Hayes, and his wife.

As we stopped in front of the house, I was clutched by a chill sense of impending disaster. The only illumination was a faint glimmer through a small, square pane. The driver honked, a door

opened, and a dark form emerged.

"Is that you, Chandler?" a voice demanded.

Resenting fiercely the familiarity of the address, I answered "Yes."

The man came forward. "I'm Hayes, the superintendent."

I shook hands with him and presented him to Mimi.

"Glad to see you," he said. "My wife wants to know if your driver's going to stay to supper?"

"No, he has to get back."

I helped Mimi out. Her ungloved hand as I touched it was cold. She had not spoken. The men behind us were busy with the bags. Together we crossed the little porch and went through the open door.

6

The room which we entered was utterly without charm. There was no fireplace. A great high-shouldered black stove gave out waves of heat which were grateful after the chill of the mountain air, but there was no glowing welcome of flames—only a sickly flicker of yellow and blue through the mica squares.

The furniture was expensive but hideous—golden oak and maroon brocade. The lamp on the table had a painted china shade. The pictures on the walls were colored photographs. Their flam-

boyant pinks and blues brought a rushing memory of the little blonde who had dined with Uncle Jerry at the Washington restaurant.

At the far end of the room a long dining-table was set for two. Above it hung a lamp with a chain mechanism by which it could be raised or lowered. A plump woman in a checked gingham dress was setting a huge platter on the table. She wiped her hands on her apron and came forward.

"I am Mrs. Hayes," she said. "I told Hayes I'd better get your supper. I thought Mrs. Chandler would be too tired to do anything herself."

My voice seemed to come from far off. "Where is the cook?"

"There ain't been any hired girl since your Uncle Jerry left. They're hard to get. He had some Indian help. The men about the place cooks for themselves, and I look after Hayes."

Again that far-off voice which was mine. "This is Mrs. Chandler, Mrs. Hayes. If you will show her to her room she can get ready for supper."

Without a glance at me, Mimi followed her. And I stood in that dreadful place, stunned by the impact of realities.

The men brought in the bags. Mrs. Hayes came back. The food was steaming on the table. "You'd better hurry or things will get cold," the good woman warned me.

"I'll call Mrs. Chandler." I found it hard to

speak. I went towards the room into which Mimi had disappeared. The door was open. As I entered, I saw that there was a room beyond. The effect of both of the bedrooms was quiet and comfortable. The furniture was walnut and the covers on the dressers and tables were snowy white. In the second room Mimi was unpacking, feverishly, the bag which Mr. Hayes had brought.

I stood on the threshold. "Mimi," I said, and my tongue seemed thick, "supper is ready, my dearest."

She turned and faced me, and I saw then that the radiance, which had been hers, was gone. "I am not dressed, Jerry," she said.

"You needn't dress, my darling."

"Why not? I've always dressed for dinner, Jerry. Do you think I'm going to give it up—" her voice was tense; "do you think I am going to give it up . . . just because I am married. Just because you have dared to begin our married life with a . . . lie . . . ?"

"Mimi," I implored, "it isn't my fault. Uncle Jerry told me it was wonderful."

"I know what he told. But you had no right to bring me here until you knew the truth. If I had dreamed I would find this—" the wave of her hands seemed to include the room in which we stood and the dreadfulness beyond, "do you think I would have come?"

She turned from me and began to lay out her things on the dresser—the crystal bottles and the silver brushes—"You'd better get ready, too, Jerry," she said in a cool little voice. "Your bags are in the other room."

I don't know what my superintendent and his wife thought of us when we finally appeared. Mimi with her bare neck and bare arms, her wisp of train, the glittering comb in her russet hair. I, miserable in my dinner jacket, drew out a chair for her. "We are sorry to be late," I said, "but we had to freshen up a bit."

Mimi, too, apologized. "It is too bad you had to cook our dinner, Mrs. Hayes. We would have brought someone with us if we had known."

"You might bring 'em, but they won't stay," said Mrs. Hayes, pessimistically. "The Indian women weren't so bad. But you can't get 'em any more for housework. The old ones are too old, and the young ones don't like it."

She had kept the food hot in the kitchen, and again brought in the big platters. I was hungry and the fried beefsteak and hot biscuits, the stewed cherries and excellent coffee had the effect of a feast to me.

But Mimi ate little. She simply sat there, an incongruous, exotic figure. "Your coffee is delicious," she told Mrs. Hayes, "but I really don't want anything else."

Mrs. Hayes, who had promised to be garrulous on first acquaintance, seemed tongue-tied. She and her husband stole glances at Mimi, as they came back and forth on various errands, he to put wood in the stove—to build up the fires in the bedrooms; she, with relays of hot biscuits. When supper was over I found that Mr. and Mrs. Hayes expected to be sociable, so we all sat around the high-shouldered stove, and Hayes and I smoked and talked of the ranch matters, while Mimi and Mrs. Hayes discussed, as I learned afterwards, domestic affairs.

At last our guests rose. "I told Mrs. Chandler to leave the dishes, and my daughter, Dora, will come over in the morning. I'd come, but it is baking day and I make all my own bread. I'm going to send a few loaves to you. Dora ain't much of a cook—but she can help with the hard work. And Mrs. Chandler don't look strong."

"I am strong enough," Mimi said, "but I am not very experienced." She was smiling, and a faint hope warmed my heart.

At last we were alone. I came back from seeing the friendly couple to the door and found Mimi standing in front of the high-shouldered stove. I put my arms around her. She shivered, but did not draw away. "My dearest," I said, "I am sorry . . . But we've got to make the best of it . . ."

She gave me a little push and stood back. "If you hadn't said that, Jerry, I—I might have for-

given you. But there isn't any best to make of it. If you had said, 'Mimi, it is *horrible.* Tomorrow we'll run away . . .' But tomorrow you expect me to . . . to talk to that awful Mrs. Hayes . . . and her daughter . . . I've never seen such people—Jerry. And there they sat and sat and *sat*—until I thought I should go *mad.* One can't be ungracious in one's own house. But . . . but you might have gotten rid of them. You might have told them I was tired. And—I don't want to make the best of it, Jerry. There isn't any best——"

"My dear," I said, "it is our home. And we are married."

She flung out her hands. "Oh, wouldn't Mother crow over me—and Olga—and Andy——"

I dropped my hands heavily on her shoulders. "Do you think," I asked sternly, "that I care what your mother thinks, or Olga, or Andy, or anybody else in the whole wide world but yourself? I would rather have died than have had this happen. But it has happened. Mimi, this is our first night in our new home . . . are you going to shut your heart against me . . . ?"

For a moment she wavered, then she said. "I can't talk about it. I only know that if we go on arguing I shall say things that hurt you . . . and I am . . . tired. Perhaps, in the morning, Jerry . . . I can think better . . ."

And so she left me, without a tender word, with-

out a kiss. And I sat by the high-shouldered black stove and thought of the wide hearth of my dreams. I thought of Mimi, as my fancy had painted her, the mistress of my castle; I thought of the simple grace which my father had always said and with which I had hoped to bless the food served at our own table.

And now my dreams were shattered; my hopes were dead. If Mimi's love had not survived this shock, it was not love as I knew it. In this lay the heartbreak. What cared I if the furniture was frightful, the pictures a blot on the walls, the high-shouldered stove a travesty on the leaping flames of my imagining. If Mimi had loved me, we could have laughed at it all, have surmounted all obstacles, have found bliss even against such a background.

I told myself that I had seen people happy in surroundings as primitive as these; there were compensations in austere living; that my father and mother had been content on their little farm. I forgot, you see, that I had not been content; that I had asked for something more than ideals and aspirations. I had wanted luxury, beauty, a life packed to the brim with vivid experience, and I had gone forth to find it.

It was late when at last I rose and went out of doors. The moon was flooding the valley, turning the stream which writhed through it into a

silver serpent. The beauty was so intense that I was hurt by it, as if it mocked the ugliness of the things which man had made.

I felt that if Mimi were by my side, lifting her eyes to the hills, there could be between us no barrier or rancor or bitterness. I wanted to call her, but I dared not.

As I stood there, something brushed against me —a cold nose touched my hand. A great dog had come out of the shadows which struck athwart the house. He had been, I learned afterwards, my uncle's pet. He was a collie, and his name was Jason. By some subtle instinct he seemed to know me at once as the new master. He stood panting beside me, his tail waving like a plume.

I was glad to have him there. I had thought before he came that my loneliness was insupportable. The heavens had seemed empty, and the earth—and I a desolate atom in a desert of despair.

CHAPTER X.

1

Mimi and I ate breakfast the next morning under the amazed eyes of Dora Hayes. In a sort of daze of admiration she set on the table the hot rolls which her mother had sent over, the ham and fried eggs, a great bowl of fresh cherries. She had never, I am sure, seen any one like Mimi, slim and white in short skirt and sweater, her hair an oriflamme in the morning sun.

Dora's youth was scrawny and freckled and tow-headed and badly dressed. Yet, I am convinced she felt no jealousy of Mimi, she gloated over her rather, as a child gloats over some newly discovered treasure.

Mimi played her part, as mistress of the house, pleasantly. She asked if she might have an egg boiled instead of fried, and she ate cherries while she waited.

"The cherries are from our own orchard," I told her.

Her eyes met mine coldly, "Are they?"

"Yes. I picked them. I've been out looking over the place." I tried to speak easily. "It isn't so bad."

Hot color flamed up into her cheeks, but she said

nothing. And presently Dora came back with the egg, and Mimi asked her a question or two—whether her mother had really risen so early to bake the bread, and the name of the collie, who stood waving his plumed tail outside of the screen door.

The collie, Dora said, had missed and mourned my uncle. "Mr. Chandler had been travelling before he died, you know, and he didn't live long after he came back here. Mother and I nursed him. And Jason never left him. He goes up the mountain every day and sits a long time by Mr. Chandler's grave, and then he seems to be satisfied. And he always stays in this house. We can't get him to come to us—we don't try any more . . . "

"Let him in, Jerry," Mimi said, and I rose and unlatched the screen. The big dog, with a flash of his eye for me, went straight up to Mimi and stood by her side, his ears cocked. He seemed to be waiting for her to make the first move in the affair of their friendship.

"Jason?" said Mimi, "I wonder why?"

"Perhaps because of his golden fleece," I ventured.

The big dog still waited. "Jason?" Mimi said again, and this time it was an interrogation, "How much are you going to love me?"

He gave a quick bark as if he understood and answered. It was his pledge of loyalty. He dropped

down on the floor by her chair, laid his head on his paws, his bright eyes seeming to weigh us as he watched.

Jason from that day was Mimi's dog in a way he was never mine; although he gave me an unwavering devotion. He became her guardian, the companion of her walks, her protector—there were times when I envied him the hours he spent with her, and from which I was shut out.

He followed us this morning when breakfast was finished, and we went out on the porch. I had said, "Come and look at our farm, Mimi," and she had hestitated. But Dora's eyes were upon us. She was clearing the table with much clattering of dishes.

"You'd better put on your hat, Mrs. Chandler," she volunteered, "you'll get all freckled."

Mimi shook her head, "I love the sun."

Our house stood on the side of the mountain, with the ranch lands on the broad lower level which might, in prehistoric times, have formed the bed of some great river. The barns were red-painted like the house, the chickens and ducks gave a kaleidoscope effect of many colors at this distance, the pigeons snow-dotted the roofs. There were cows in the pasture, and men and horses in the wide meadows. Towards the west were the cherry orchards, their round-topped trees like great bou-

quets; beyond the orchards a neighboring mountain rose silver-crested against a sapphire sky.

I wanted to say, "God made it," as my father had so often said, when we worshipped beauty. But I lacked the courage to speak my thoughts to Mimi. I had my first sharp sense of a point of divergence in our ideals.

What I said was, "Mimi, doesn't all this make up a bit for the house?"

She did not look at me. "Jerry, nothing can make up. I'm not fitted for this life. I don't know where to begin . . . "

Something seemed to die in me. Through the darkness which had fallen upon me I tried to grope my way back to the words of that radiant ceremony, *"For better for worse . . . for richer . . . for poorer . . . "*

Mimi had never meant them. She had said she could not be poor. And I, knowing how she felt, had urged her to perjure herself with a promise.

Well, I wouldn't hold her to it. I spoke with an effort—"I have no right to ask you to stay, Mimi."

She turned on me her startled glance, "What do you mean?"

"I thought it all over last night. The best thing we can do is to go back to St. Louis."

"But we can't go back!"

"Why not?"

"Do you think I could face them? No. We'll

stick it out somehow. I couldn't bear to have my friends know how I had been—fooled."

Her pride spoke there—peacock feathers! She wasn't thinking of my love of her. She was thinking of what other people would say—Andy and Olga and all the rest. Pride mattered more to her than love—more than anything in the whole wide world.

I tried again, "If we love each other enough——"

She broke in. "Oh, what does either of us know of love? If you had loved me you wouldn't have made me risk a thing like this . . . We've been just two children playing with our emotions . . ."

I caught her hands up in mine, crushing them until she winced. "Speak for yourself, Mimi. But you shall not say such things of me . . ."

"You are hurting my hand, Jerry."

"You are hurting my heart."

I did not let her go, and presently she ceased to struggle and I had her in my arms. "Oh, Jerry, Jerry," she whispered, after a long tense silence, "I've been such a little—beast to say such things —to you . . ."

I knew then that she was mine again, that my masterfulness had conquered. But the things she had said had left a scar. And the problem which were before us had found no real solution.

2

The question of a maid became a burning one. Dora Hayes was, it seemed, to go in a day or two to a summer hotel on the other side of the mountain. I offered her equal wages, but she wanted the excitement of the change of scene and of the company she would meet. It was, in a sense, for Dora a social opportunity. There were young men employed about the hotel—other girls in other seasons had found their mates.

Mrs. Hayes was sorry that she could not cook for us, but Dora was the oldest of a family of six. Left thus, by her daughter's departure, to do the work for a family of seven, plus certain of the farm laborers, who were boarders, Mrs. Hayes' hands were more than full.

"It wouldn't be hard work for just the two of you, Mrs. Chandler," she told Mimi, "if you knew how to do it."

"But I don't know how, Mrs. Hayes. I've never made a biscuit, or baked a cake, or fried a chicken in my life."

"Well, I could learn you," said kind Mrs. Hayes, beaming.

It was I who protested. "We simply must have some one to help my wife." I could not see Mimi as a daily drudge—with her hands rough, her lovely face above a pan of steaming dishes. It made no difference to me that my mother had done

these things, I wanted Mimi always silken and shining.

On the day that Dora left us we annexed the half-breed wife of one of the farm laborers. Her name was Sally, and she came up twice a day and did the heavy work. She could cook nothing, however, except the coarse food which her husband demanded. So I supplemented her efforts, and became the family *chef*. It was easy enough in a way, and a relief from my writing. When Mimi protested, I laughed. "It will be a great game, just the two of us—and with Mrs. Hayes' bread, and plenty of fruit and vegetables. And I've written to Denver. They ought to get a maid to us in a week or ten days, perhaps before that. It will be easy enough until she comes."

Mimi entered whole-heartedly into the spirit of it all. We lived picnic-fashion, and thought of the arrangement as temporary. Except when the weather was bad we ate our meals on the porch, which overlooked the valley. I boiled the eggs and made the toast and coffee, and Mimi set the table —giving it a festive look with fruit and flowers.

Those out-of-door feasts were a matter of great curiosity to the five small Hayes children. They ranged in ages from two to eleven, and they were all as tow-headed and as freckled as Dora. The Hayes' house was on the mountain above us, but faced, fortunately, the back of our domicile, other-

wise I am sure we should have eaten always with an audience gazing down upon us, spoiling our solitude and the scene.

They often visited us, however; a trail of them in calico and blue denim—well-fed, rosy, and utterly bewitched by Mimi. Like Dora they moved in a daze of admiration. Mimi found in them a never-ending source of interest and amusement. "I didn't know there were such people in the world, Jerry. And they haven't any manners. They just stare and laugh."

I had seen many such children. I had been brought up among them. I had known their intelligence, their quickness of thought, their sense of humor. But to Mimi they were funny little puppets, a part of the show, as the kittens were a part of it, or the bantam roosters, or the waddling line of little ducks. She laughed at them, but never with them, and the difference is great.

Their names were Jimmie Hayes and Johnnie Hayes and Mary and Susie Hayes, and the oldest one was Timothy. How twelve-year-old Timothy had escaped from being called "Tim" nobody could tell. But the long name suited him; he was, in the last analysis, a dignified little chap—and he was more than that. He was a child of great imagination and sensibility.

He attached himself at once to Mimi, following her as faithfully as Jason, but leaving her with-

out any signs of sensitiveness when she indicated that she wanted to be alone.

Her capture of him had come about one day when she told the five children the story of the "Wild Swans." I found them all one afternoon in a grove of pines not far from the house. The ground beneath the trees was bare of all undergrowth; there was a carpet of needles, with a few boulders shouldering through them. Mimi sat on one of the boulders. She was dressed in green and looked like a dryad. She was very dramatic in her rendering of the story, and I kept out of sight until she had finished it.

From where I stood I could see Timothy. He looked up, caught my eyes on him, and a wave of color almost obscured his freckles. But in another moment he had forgotten me, and was hanging on Mimi's words.

But that night when Mimi and I sat on the porch in the moonlight, a lanky youth rounded the corner of the house, and stood in front of us.

"Mrs. Chandler," he said, "I came down to ask you about that girl."

"What girl, Timothy?"

"The one in the story that made all the shirts for her brothers. She didn't have to make them shirts, did she?"

"No. She did it because she loved them, and she didn't want to see them suffer——"

"Well, I'll bet you Mary Hayes wouldn't sew on no shirts like that for me or Jimmie or Johnnie."

"She might, Timothy, if it would save you from some unhappiness."

He pondered that, sitting on the step, his face turned up to the sky; transfigured by the white light into a beauty not unlike that of a painting I had seen of the "Boy of Winander."

"Well, I guess we don't any of us know what we would do till the time comes, do we? But that was some girl to sew on them shirts."

He left us and we laughed a little. Yet, it was Mimi who said, "He's a darling, Jerry—and he doesn't know it."

Except for the Hayes family and the farm laborers, we saw practically no one from week-end to week-end. The nearest ranches were several miles away, and two of them were owned by upstanding Scandinavians, practical farmers with whom I found it easy to be neighborly, but whose wives had absolutely nothing in common with Mimi. They talked continually of their housekeeping, their health, and of their children. Both of them were heavy, somewhat blowzy creatures, though rosy-cheeked and smiling, with families of tow-headed freckled children not unlike the Hayes tribe.

"I don't see what they get out of life," Mimi

stated, as we rode home one day from brief calls at the two places.

"Perhaps," I said, "they love their husbands and their children enough to make up for all the rest."

Mimi tilted up her chin. "They are happy because they don't know any better," she said scornfully.

We rode one day in the little Ford car, which was used about the farm, to the summer hotel, twenty miles away, where Dora worked. It was high up on one of the highest mountains, and was a charming, rambling structure, built absolutely in accord with the landscape. Its timbers were rough-hewn, there were great stone fireplaces, and the simple furniture was beautified and brightened by Indian rugs and pottery.

"If we had a house like this, Jerry," Mimi said, "it would be wonderful . . . "

"Perhaps we may . . . some day . . . "

She stood looking into the roaring fire. "It was a hearth like this of which I dreamed . . . "

We stayed for dinner and danced afterwards. The hotel had a fashionable mid-Western patronage, and I am sure that Mimi was recognized. We were much observed. "When you get your affairs settled we can buy a good car and come often," Mimi said happily, as we rode home.

3

Our honeymoon progressed in a sort of maze of haphazard housekeeping. Sally's ministrations kept us from actual chaos, and when the ugliness of golden oak and maroon brocade got too much on Mimi's nerves she found refuge in our own rooms, which shone with the crystal and silver which she had brought, and from which she had banished everything but the walnut furniture and our own belongings.

I had a desk by my window and Mimi always kept flowers on it. I had believed that the view of the mountains and Mimi's presence would inspire me to write masterpieces—but I was doomed to disappointment. I found it, indeed, difficult to write anything at all. For some reason my pen lacked fire. It was as if in living so vividly I had robbed myself of the power to express that vividness on paper.

Moreover, I yearned to be out of doors with Mimi, riding over our domain, and beyond it—up the trails to little lakes cupped in the top of the lower peaks, with yellow lilies reflected in their depths and the slim trunks of the pale aspens. It was wonderful to be alone in all that vast loneliness—going up and up through spruce and pine—to see a coyote like a gray shadow crossing our path, or a deer with startled eyes, and the lovely wild leap which took it out of our sight.

It was as if our lives had two sides—the side of the ugly house with the hateful shadows of drudgery which hung over it; the side which had to do with ugly memories of the things Mimi had said to me on the night of our arrival and the morning after; the ugly side of my financial uncertainties. And that other side, of Mimi in the orchard, with cherries looped over her ears, Mimi in the sweet hay of one of the barns, with a puff-ball of a kitten in her lap, Mimi brushing her bright hair with a silver brush, Mimi whipping the streams with her trout line, and beating me at it with a skill she had learned in the Maine woods.

I cooked the trout for our dinner—and we had vegetables from our own garden—and perhaps a sweet loaf of Mrs. Hayes' baking or a dish of cream cheese which she had made for us.

Idyllic? Yes. And it couldn't last. There was always that haunting thought of the other side of things, and the crash came in a letter from my lawyer. There were, he said, practically no funds at my disposal. If I could make the farm pay I might tide over the present crisis. Otherwise, he would advise me to sell.

There was a letter, too, from the employment agency at Denver. They gave me little hope—they might be able to send a cook if I was willing to give very high wages. There was much objection on account of the remoteness of the ranch. The

sum they named as wages took my breath away. I had never dreamed of such rewards for domestic service.

I had made up my mind when we were first married I would have no secrets from Mimi. In an ideal singleness of soul, a man and his wife should bear their burdens together. But it seemed to me now that I would better let well enough alone. Why worry Mimi with things which might straighten themselves? I would give more time to the management of the ranch and less to writing. I might even get along without Hayes. He had, himself, suggested it. He wanted to accept an offer to take charge, for the summer, of the livery stable at the hotel where Dora worked. He knew all about the mountain ponies, and could teach the guests to ride. He could make more money in three months than I could give him in a year.

When I told Mimi that Hayes was going, she asked, "But who will manage the farm?"

"I shall do it myself."

"But when do you expect to write, Jerry? You can't be cook and manager, and an author."

"Why not?"

"Well, it isn't fair," there was a flush on her cheeks.

"I am strong. I can stand it."

"I am strong, too, Jerry. You must let me help."

But I felt it would be an entering wedge to

destroy her exquisiteness. I had a desperate feeling that something must turn up. I wrote again to my lawyer and told him to sell an acre or two of land. I wrote, too, to the employment agency in Denver, urging them to send a cook, and stating I would pay the price.

It was when I began to do Hayes' work, however, that I found what I had undertaken. The laborers on the farm lacked any sort of initiative. They were accustomed to constant supervision, and could not work without it. They must follow a leader or remain inactive. This made it necessary for me to be with them almost constantly; it made necessary, indeed, actual physical effort on my part. I helped them with the hay, I helped them with the cows, I stood over them while they white-washed chicken-houses, and put up wire fences, and while they taught the young calves to drink.

And after such efforts I would come into the house dead-tired and dirty to find Mimi immaculate, with flowers on the table, with a great can of hot water ready for my bath, with my clothes laid out on the bed.

One night when I had had an exceptionally hard day, the thought of such formality irritated me. I had had to stop in the kitchen to supervise Sally —to see that the lettuce was cold, and that the little roasted ducklings were done to a turn. I had asked her questions about the sweet potatoes, and

the coffee. I had seen myself, suddenly, as a farcical figure—a plain farmer, trying to measure up to a fairy-princess of a wife.

So I said to Mimi, who stood cool and crisp by the screen-door looking out on the mountains, "I think I shall stop dressing for dinner—. It is rather out of keeping isn't it with the *tout ensemble?*"

"People who don't dress for dinner are—barbarians."

"My own people didn't do it."

"Do you mean that they looked—like you?"

There was scorn in that, and I winced. I told her the truth, "No, they didn't. My father always wore his black coat. My mother insisted on it. She was proud of him."

"It is a woman's pride in her man which keeps the world civilized," my wife told me. "I—I think I should—hate you, Jerry, if you—degenerated into the kind of man like those on the other ranches."

"Do you think I could?" I demanded. "Do you think that clothes count as much as that?"

"They count a great deal," coolly. "You'd hate me if I wore my hair in a tight knot and had a shiny nose like Sally."

I fled then and dressed. We had been very near a quarrel. But I was aware when dinner was over, and Mimi and I sat on the porch, that my self-

respect was much increased by the perfection of my attire. Yet, I was aware, too, that there must be something the matter with both of us if externals counted so much.

So I continued to labor through the day like any farm hand. At night I played the gentleman. The thing couldn't, of course, continue. And I couldn't see where it would end. I felt that I ought not let things slide, but they were sliding. I wondered how I should meet the avalanche of disaster when it came.

BOOK THREE
MYSELF

CHAPTER XI.

1

It was in August that we heard from Lionel—a jubilant letter. He had done a set of stories for one of the big-paying magazines, and he had been asked for as many more as he could write.

"Everybody has forgiven us, Jerry. They have killed the fatted calf, and Bernice is having the time of her young life saying 'I told you so' to her parents. Nothing succeeds like success. I wish we might come out to see you and Mimi, but Bernice and I are thinking of Paris—that is, if this unholy invasion of Belgium by Germany doesn't stir things up too much. However, why worry? With modern ammunition no war can possibly last six months.

"The whole town is talking of your romance. It has been featured in all the papers, and I am sending you the latest account. Nothing authentic, I am sure, but if your life is anything like this sounds it must be at top-notch. Mrs. Le Brun says that Mimi's letters are rapturous—that she adores the mountains, and that you and she spend hours in the saddle. It sounds good to me at this particular moment, when the thermometer here is in the nineties.

"All of our world is, of course, away, but I have these stories to do—and, as I have said, Paris is in the offing. Olga is also staying on. There is talk that she may marry again—she is seen everywhere with a steel magnate who has just brought his plant to St. Louis. It would be the irony of fate, wouldn't it, if Olga should add multi-millions to grandfather's fortune? I wish highwaymen were in fashion, I'd tie my head up in a handkerchief, and strip her some night of her diamonds! Oh, well, old chap, here's to your health and happiness, but I know you have them without my wishing. What are you writing? Don't stop because you have married a wife. Stiles Sanderson groans every time your name is mentioned. He says you are a genius spoiled by luxury and loving. He quotes Aldrich—you remember, don't you, 'The Flight of the Duchess'?:

"The woman I loved was now my bride,
And the home I wanted was my own,
I turned to the Goddess satisfied,
But the Goddess had somehow flown . . .

"For a man must live in a garret aloof,
And have few friends and go poorly clad,
With an old hat stopping a chink in the roof,
To keep the Goddess constant and glad."

I read Lionel's letter to Mimi as we rode home from the little post-office at the cross-roads. She

made no comment when I finished, but there was a flush on her cheeks.

"It was good of you," I said, as I put the letter back in my pocket, "to write that way to your mother."

The flush deepened. "I knew people would be asking questions. And I didn't want them to know the truth."

I turned in my saddle. "Just what do you mean by that, Mimi? What is the truth?"

"Oh, well, things are different, aren't they, from what we expected?"

"Yes."

"I told Mother that I adore the mountains, and I do. And when we are on our horses, Jerry, I am happy—that's enough for Mother. If I had given all the facts—that you work like a slave, while I twiddle my thumbs, we should be the laughing stock of St. Louis."

"Do you think I care," I flung out furiously, "what St. Louis thinks?"

"I care," obstinately, "they are my people."

There seemed to be nothing to say in answer to that, so we rode on in silence. I had had another letter which I did not show Mimi. It was from the employment agency, and it gave me no encouragement. At this season of the year women preferred work in the hotels to that on ranches. They might be able to do better for me later.

The news seemed at the moment appalling. That very morning our half-breed, Sally, had left us. She and her husband had felt the call of the open road, and she was going back to visit her own people until cold weather came on.

I had cooked the breakfast, and had carried Mimi's chocolate in to her. She had been adorable in a frilly blue negligee and lace cap. The contrast between the luxury encompassed by the four walls of her room, and the state of the kitchen after Sally's hurried departure, had been startling. I had sat and talked with her, trying to make a joke of it all, while my heart was like lead.

I proposed, before I left her, that she should ride to the post-office with me. I had found that out of doors she was more like herself. The untidiness of the house oppressed her, weighed on her spirits. While she dressed I had made things as straight as I could. I refused to face the fact that we should have stayed at home, to bring some kind of order out of the awful chaos of Sally's housekeeping.

Yet, should we have stayed? And why face facts? It was with a sort of eat-drink-and-be-merry attitude that I had closed the door behind us, and had left Jason on guard.

To push the joys of our adventure to its extreme limits, I suggested later that we ride back to the house—get the little car, and motor to the hotel for

luncheon. When we returned that night we could have a picnic supper—there would be no dishes, no cares until the next day.

Mimi was at once lighted by anticipation. "You're a darling, Jerry." And so young was I, so ready to be happy, that I flung all forebodings away from me, and took my holiday with a will.

When we entered the hotel, we were much observed. We still wore our riding clothes, and we created, as always, a sensation. I was picturesque in corduroys and broad sombrero, while Mimi, in gray, with her peacock feather, was like a gallant boy.

I asked for a room, that we might make ourselves presentable, and when I had signed for it I cast my eyes idly over the names on the register.

Then, suddenly, the world turned black. There was a scrawled signature which seemed to have a sinister significance; a name I should never have looked for in that place.

I lost my nerve completely. I wanted to pick Mimi up and fly with her back to our ugly red-painted house and shut her in. I was overwhelmed by a sense of impending catastrophe.

I controlled myself, however, and followed the boy to our room. As the bright light from the window streamed upon me, I saw Mimi observing me with some curiosity. "How pale you are, Jerry? Aren't you well?"

I caught at that as giving me a possible excuse. "I have a beastly headache. Would you mind very much if we had lunch in our room?"

A shadow fell across her face, but she managed to say, cheerfully, "Of course we'll have it—if you'd rather."

My mood changed in a moment. I decided recklessly to take the chance. If the thing was to be, it would be. Why try to hide? "I'll rest a bit, and see what happens," I told her, "I don't want to spoil our day."

We went down, finally, to the dining-room. We were late, and most of the guests had eaten and gone. I had little appetite, but Mimi was hungry, and enjoyed the really delicious food. She was as gay as you please and talked and sparkled. I responded as best I could. To people at the other tables we must have seemed at our ease and carefree. And how could they know that the sight of every tall man who entered the room drained the blood from my face and made my heart beat madly?

It was not until we were a mile or two away from the hotel that I drew a quiet breath. Mimi insisted on driving the car back, and I did not protest. My nerves were shaken, but that was not the reason I let her drive. I had a feeling that in keeping her eyes on the road she might miss seeing, clearly, any one who passed.

Nothing happened on the way home, but I knew

the blow would fall, and it did. Three days later we were riding up the trail towards the lake in the cup of the mountains. The ascent was steep, but our ponies knew every inch of it. They stepped carefully, and took what seemed almost insurmountable hazards with an air of lazy accustomedness. It is impossible to give in words the charm of that high country—the wine of the air, the perfume of sun-warmed evergreens, the color and contrast of golden aspen and gray rocks, the emerald shadows of the wooded spaces.

We came at last to a plateau, where our horses rested. From this height we could survey the trail below. We could see the faint line of it, lost here and there among the trees, but emerging always in a zig-zag descent towards the valley. Not a soul was in sight. I lifted Mimi from her horse, and held her in my arms. "This is our world, my dearest. Say that you love me, Mimi."

She said it. She seemed all mine in that moment. My doubts fled. She *was* mine, no one could take her from me . . .

We had brought our lunch with us, and when I brought it from our bags, I saw that Mimi was again staring down the trail.

"There's some one coming up," she told me.

I crossed the intervening space and stood beside her. Far down a horseman was ascending. He wore a broad hat, which, at that distance, gave the

effect of an animated mushroom as it bobbed up and down. As he came nearer we caught the "tic-tac" of his horse's hoofs on the loose rocks. Then we saw his lacquered boots glisten in the sun. He rode in the English style, and lacked the swinging grace which makes the cowboy the centaur of the plains.

Higher he came, and higher. I was aware of the horseman's height, of his length of limb. Then suddenly my breath seemed to leave me! I knew who it was. The thing had happened! Here was the man whose name had been scrawled on the register. Andy Fuller was riding up the trail!

2

It was too late, of course, to avoid him. There was only one path, and he must take it. Even if I made some excuse for flight, he would be upon us before we could get away.

But I would not watch him come. I went over a rock, and set out our box of sandwiches and Thermos bottle of coffee. Nearer and nearer echoed the "tic-tac" of his horse's hoofs. Waves of hot blood seemed to flow over me as I stared out towards the mountains. I knew that if Mimi saw my face she would be aware of my agitation, so I kept my back to her. I tried to whistle, and managed a few faint notes of a popular tune.

I heard a gasp, and knew that he was upon us.

"Andy," Mimi was saying, incredulously, "Where did you come from?"

I whirled around to see him leap from his horse and catch both of her hands in his. "I've found you at last, Mimi."

"Were you looking for me?"

"Why else should I be in this God-forsaken country?" he was smiling down at her. "I've been staying at the hotel at Eagle Lake—" he broke off to say, "Hello, Jerry," as I came forward.

"This is—unexpected," my voice was cool.

"Rather, isn't it? I intended to ride over to your ranch and surprise you. But the first day on these roads put my car out of commission. And while I was waiting to have it fixed, I thought I'd try some of the trails. This is great luck——"

I simply loathed his air of assuming a welcome. I stood there, stiffly, saying nothing.

But Mimi's tone was eager. "It is heavenly to see you, Andy."

I wondered if she really meant it. How *could* she mean it? I remembered the things she had said: *"How Andy would crow."*

And now she was urging him to stay and have lunch with us. "There's enough for an army. And there's so much to talk about."

Well, he accepted, and I broke bread with him as if he were not my bitterest enemy. Our three horses grazed on the dry, crisp grass.

And Andy was asking questions? "So you're happy, Mimi?"

"Of course."

"But after the honeymoon, what? I can't quite see you contented in these surroundings."

"Can't you? Why not?"

"Oh, there's nothing here but sky and mountains."

She laughed, with her chin tilted and her eyes lighted. "Nothing but the sky and mountains—and Jerry."

"So that's it," dryly, "I see."

But he did not see what I saw. That Mimi was playing the game to the limit. If she had suffered disillusionment, he was not to know. I wondered if she was conscious of what was ahead of her. How did she expect to meet the moment when he would see our ugly house?

When we finished our lunch I gathered up the papers, and burned them carefully on the bare rock, stamping out the fire. Then I said, briefly, "It is going to rain."

The sky had grown dark—the air was filled with the strange unquiet which comes before a storm. Leaves danced madly against the murky gray—there was the rush of wind in the pines.

Mimi hated storms. She turned on me her startled glance. "Isn't there any place we can run for shelter?"

I helped her to her horse, and led the way. Andy brought up the rear, with Mimi between us. The whole thing had the effect of unreality—that the three of us should be high up in this mountain world alone—I and my wife, and the man who loved her.

The trapper's hut had been empty for years. The country had been hunted over until there were few animals left whose furs were valuable. But the hut was built of good sound logs, and was in the center of an open grassy space. Within were a few broken chairs, a rickety table—cobwebs were woven in fantastic draperies across the windows—there was the rustle of field mice among the dried leaves that had drifted in through the open door.

We had a race for it towards the end. Mimi's hat was off, and blowing back from her face. Andy's hat was off, too, and mine—the blood was red in our cheeks where the wind had buffeted them—! What a picture to look back upon—with our racing horses, our youth, the storm at our heels.

We came into the cabin laughing, with the sheer joy of the excitement. The rain drove in after us. Andy and I pushed the shrieking door shut, and there we were in darkness.

"Some ride!" Andy said.

"I adore it," Mimi was breathless.

We sat down on the rickety chairs, and gradually our faces emerged like white masks in the

uncertain light which blurred the rain-washed, cobwebby windows.

And now a constraint came upon us. Our voices, beating against the noise of the thunder, were thin and artificial. The lightning, washing through the room in waves of incandescence, gave us an air of unreality, as if we were ghosts of the bright creatures who had raced with the storm.

It was after one of the weird illuminations that Mimi clutched my arm. "Jerry, I'm afraid."

I drew her to me. What did I care if Andy was there to resent my air of possession? She was mine. "My dearest," I said, "it will soon be over."

Andy struck a match and lighted a cigarette. The spurt of the flame showed his dark face.

"Nobody," he said, with a touch of his old insolence, "is going to believe it when I go back."

"Believe what?" Mimi demanded.

"That I found you two billing and cooing like turtle-doves."

Mimi's laugh had a teasing quality. "What did you expect to find?"

"I thought by this time you would be bored to extinction."

"But, I'm not."

"No," abruptly—"apparently not." Then, after a moment's silence. "I came with some news for you. But it can wait. You are going to ask me to

dine, aren't you, Mimi? I want to see your earthly paradise."

I held my breath. My mind was filled with the vision of that ugly, red-painted structure. Of the cluttered kitchen, of dead flowers in the vases, the hopeless untidiness and commonplaceness of it all.

Then, amazingly cool and controlled, Mimi's voice beat against my consciousness.

"But, I am not going to ask you to dine with us, Andy, nor to see our Paradise."

3

Fuller was, I know, as surprised as I. "You aren't? Why not?"

"Because up here in the mountains, where men are red-blooded," there was laughter in her voice, "real men, you know, there might be danger."

"What kind of danger?"

"You and Jerry would be at each other's throat before the evening was over. Isn't that the way it is always in novels? A lonely spot—three people—gun play—tragedy? It is what we get in the movies, isn't it?"

He was impatient. "My dear Mimi, be serious."

"I am serious."

"You are not."

In spite of her light manner, I knew that she was in dead earnest. She was still playing the game,

but the stakes were high. She didn't want Andy to see our ugly house. She meant that he should not see it. He should not take back with him the story of her disillusionment. And her quick mind had found this way out of it.

Yet, I hated the way she had found. I wanted her to say, "Oh, we've got a hideous old house, Andy, but we're happy. Things aren't a bit what we expected—but we are happy. You can go back and say to my friends that I am happy because Jerry is mine and I am his—and nothing else counts but that."

I know now that such an attitude was too much to expect of any woman. But I judged her by myself. I hated poverty—but rather than spend my life without her I would have tramped the roads—have slept under the stars.

The roll of the thunder grew fainter, the darkness lifted. I opened the door and the sweet fresh air rushed in.

Andy resumed the subject where our silence had seemed to end it. "Now that I can see your face," he said to Mimi, "I am going to find out if you really meant it, when you told me I was not to visit you."

"Of course I meant it. Don't you know that no human being has a right to interrupt a honeymoon."

"Oh, well," he said, gloomily, "if you are going to look at it like that."

"How else can I look at it?"

"Yet you said it was 'heavenly' to see me."

"It is. But—you and Jerry aren't terribly keen about each other, are you?"

I had a feeling of unreasonable irritation. "We wouldn't fly at each other's throats, if that is what you mean, Mimi, or scratch each other's eyes out."

Andy quite surprisingly agreed with Mimi. "Perhaps, she is right, Chandler. When she was afraid and turned to you, I could have seen you hanged with joy. You've got her, and I might as well give her up. But I've seen what I wanted. If you hadn't made her happy, I should have tried to find a way to do it."

It was a frank declaration of his motive in coming. My voice was full of suppressed fury as I answered. "I am sorry to seem as inhospitable as Mimi."

He stared moodily out on the lovely world that the storm had left behind—there was a sort of silver radiance—the mountains were swept with emerald light.

When at last he spoke, he flung the sentences forth like a challenge. "I am going to France. I want to get into the flying service."

With a stroke as it were of the brush, he became a heroic figure.

"It will be wonderful, Andy," Mimi was illumined.

He looked down at her, "Will it? Would it be wonderful if Jerry did it?"

"Do you mean that I wouldn't want him to go? Oh, why not, Andy? It would be wonderful for any one, if it were for France."

I had never heard her speak like that. We had discussed the war, and I had known that her traditions held her absolutely to the French point of view. But here was something which seemed to have gone deeper. A sense of the sacredness of a cause. It was Andy's action which had revealed it to me. I wondered if she would really be willing to have me leave her. To match his heroics with my own?

We mounted our horses and rode until our paths parted, about half-way between our ranch and the hotel, which meant a ride of at least ten miles for all of us. When Andy left us we shook hands with him. We bade him a final "good-bye," Mimi and I stood for a moment, looking after him, then we whirled our horses about, and rode down the trail in the darkening light.

During the ride home, Mimi had little to say to me. She seemed tired and dispirited.

"I had to keep him away, Jerry," she said at last, "it sounded—silly. But it was the best I could do."

"Why not have told him, Mimi?"

"Do you mean about—the house?"

"About ourselves. That we could be happy in spite of the ugliness. That because we have each other we can be happy."

I laid my hand on her shoulder, "Couldn't you have told him that, dearest? And have let him come?"

She turned a little in her saddle, "Jerry, you're not facing it. You didn't want him any more than I. Not really You're just trying to make yourself think that you did."

I dropped my hand from her shoulder, and we rode on. Our way was dark now, but the afterglow still lingered above the mountains. Our horses were worn out, and so were we. We came to our ugly ranch house, and no light shone to welcome us.

We went in, and I found my way to the lamp. As the flame flared, the disorder of the place was revealed. Mimi stood uncertainly in the middle of the room. Then she lifted her hands in a desperate gesture. "Do you mind, Jerry, if I don't stay up? I don't want anything to eat, I am simply—*dead.*"

I felt stricken and alone, hurt to the heart. But I tried not to show it. "Sit down," I said, "and let me take off your boots. Then I'll heat some water good and hot for your bath."

I knelt at her feet, and unlaced the soft deerskin

leggings. I brought her slippers. As I put them on I felt her arms about my neck.

"You are such a darling, Jerry," she said, and cried as if her heart would break.

4

I thought we had heard the last of Andy, and I tried to put him, as much as possible, out of my mind. His coming had in a way formed a turning point in our domestic relations. The morning after we met him, Mimi had walked into the kitchen while I was making her chocolate, and announced that she was going to help me get the breakfast.

"I have yours almost ready, dearest."

She stood on tiptoe, and brushed my cheek with her lips. "I am not going to have my chocolate in bed any more."

"Why not?"

"I am going to be the angel of the house, Jerry." There was a new look in her eyes, as she stood in front of me, beating a tattoo with her slender fingers on the breast of my flannel shirt. "You take care of your job, and I'll take care of mine. I'll get Mrs. Hayes to show me things."

"Mimi," I protested, "I hate to have you do it."

"You mustn't hate it, Jerry. It weakens me," her lips trembled. "I—I have the feeling that, perhaps, you can't stand realities—. That if you see me without my war paint—you won't love me."

"I shall always love you."

She nodded. "Oh, of course. You are that kind —constant. But the fine glamour—the illusion. I wonder how you'll feel when my hands are rough, and my hair at loose ends—like Dora Hayes?"

"You will never be like Dora Hayes, my darling."

"Who knows?" she was smiling a little. "After I've washed millions of dishes—and peeled tons of potatoes?"

We had talked for a long time the night before. We had declared to each other that we would shut, definitely, the door of the life which was behind us. Mimi had clung to me, sobbing, she had seemed all mine for the moment. I had sworn that with her as my goddess I would write with an inspired pen. And things would work out for us, I was sure, if we loved enough.

We were very young—everything had seemed, for the moment, possible. We did not know ourselves. We did not know each other. We did not know life. We were like untried warriors, riding valiantly to battle.

Well, we got the breakfast—and Mimi burned the toast.

"But tomorrow I shan't burn it, Jerry," she said, hopefully, "you'll see. I am really much more intelligent than I look," she threw a kiss to me across the table.

Yet, when breakfast was over, I could not settle

down to my desk. "Let's ride for an hour," I proposed, "and come back and do the work."

We rode for more than an hour, and came back and washed the dishes; and ate lunch, and washed more dishes. I sat down at my desk at three, and another storm came up; the thunder roared and the rain swept across the valley, the lightning was like a conflagration. Mimi was afraid, and ran into my room, and I comforted her. Then it was time for dinner—and we washed more dishes—; we again mounted our horses and rode up and up the trail to see the moonlight on our little lake.

When we returned, I said, "My dearest, I am going to sit at my desk for an hour or two. I haven't written a half dozen lines."

"Oh, you're too tired tonight, Jerry. And tomorrow you can do better."

But tomorrow was much the same, and the day after, and at last a letter from my lawyer brought disquieting news of inadequate finances.

I went to work then in earnest. I bent over my desk for hours. I left the housework, largely, to Mimi and to Timothy Hayes. Timothy had entered upon the domestic scene as a substitute for Sally. He had helped his mother, he could help Mimi. He would have adored doing it for nothing. But I insisted on a wage. He was not an expert, but he was industrious. He could wield a broom and wash dishes, and save Mimi a thousand steps.

It was at this time that Jason, the collie, and young Timothy began to be Mimi's constant companions. I could see them from my window as I wrote, making their way to the lower level—Jason keeping well ahead with his steady trot—Timothy, his face upturned to Mimi. She told them stories. That was the great bond between them—Orson, the Little Gray Mouse, Good Little Henry.

They would come back up the hill with fresh eggs in a basket, with vegetables from the garden, or with fruit from the orchards. Mimi was taking her housekeeping seriously, there were things to be canned, things to be preserved, and things to be pickled. Mrs. Hayes initiated her into all of the mysteries.

After one day's orgy of preserving, Mimi dragged me into the kitchen. "Look, Jerry, aren't they wonderful?" She displayed row upon row of jars and glasses—amber and ruby and deep amethyst where the sun shone through.

She was dishevelled but triumphant. She was tied up in a huge gingham apron, and there was a burn on her arm. I tried to be enthusiastic about her achievements, but I hated to see her in the aspect of a kitchen maid. I wished that she might look always as she did at the end of the day. She managed then to have Timothy or me put the finishing touches to the dinner while she had a quick bath, and slipped on one of her charming gowns.

She would come to the table fresh and fragrant, her hair carefully coiffed, transformed as it were in a moment from the kitchen slavey to the *chatelaine* of the castle.

No matter how tired she was, our dinners had always this effect of formality. She even taught Timothy to serve, so that he could change plates and pass the bread and vegetables. His ecstasy was complete. He was, I am sure, in imagination, cupbearer to a princess—a princess who wore gowns which revealed the loveliness of her white neck, and who was as fragrant as a rose.

He liked her best that way—as a princess. And I liked her best—as a princess. Well, who can blame a man for that? Yet, if I had thought of it then, as I think of it now, I would have remembered that my father's love for my mother had been stable and steady in spite of her plain hair, her print gowns, her lack of elegance.

5

Things jogged along with some effect of harmony and happiness through September and into October. I had finished a story and had sent it off. Mimi had organized, of all things, a dancing class for the tribe of small Hayeses! They had their lessons out of doors, and she had contrived costumes of home-dyed cottons and of autumn leaves. Timothy was a faun, and the bacchante of small

Susie Hayes was an amazing achievement. Her purple and russet draperies, the wreath of vines, the bunch of grapes held high brought a fleeting memory of Theresa's grace and beauty.

"Isn't she adorable?" Mimi asked, with her eyes on Susie. "She is so utterly in earnest and so oblivious of her freckles——"

"You've worked a miracle, Mimi."

"Well, it's interesting—. Doing things like this, Jerry. And they are such dears. Look at Timothy —! Isn't he the spirit of youth? I am teaching him to be light on his feet, and fleet. He simply adores that word—'fleet.' He makes me say it over and over."

It was after dinner, and we were sitting on the porch. The children danced in an open space among the aspens. The golden leaves were falling, blown about by an autumn wind—. The music was provided by Timothy, for whom I had made a pipe of reeds—its thin notes seemed a part of the magic of the twilight—the purple shadows—the faint stars—.

In the half-light, the children seemed transformed—Timothy, slender and beautiful, fluttered his fingers above his rustic instrument—the weird notes came like the call of Pan.

If any one had told me, when Mimi and I watched the dancing children, that twenty-four hours later we would face chaos, I would have laughed at

them. I was in a mood of quiet content. I had finished my story and felt it was good. Mimi's hand was in mine—God was in His heaven—!

I had planned to spend the next day up on the mountain. There was wood to be cut, and I was to take two of my men with me to decide on the trees which must be sacrificed.

Mimi decided to stay at home. "There are tomatoes spoiling on the vines," she told me, "and Mrs. Hayes is going to show me how to make catsup and chili."

"Must you do it today?"

"Why not? While you are gone? We'll get through early, and I'll rest, and be all ready for you. And you won't see me performing the dreadful rites."

I put my finger under her chin. "Do you really feel that they are dreadful rites?"

"No, I rather like it all, Jerry. I feel so—useful—" she made a little face at me—. "Perhaps, underneath, I'm just French housewife. Who knows? But you don't like me tied up in gingham aprons."

"I like you in anything," I protested violently.

"Not so much when I'm not groomed and gorgeous. That's the man in you, Jerry. You men say you want us domestic and housewifely, but you don't know yourselves. The women that you really fall for are the Circes and Loreleis."

I hotly denied it. I racked my mind for literary examples of domestic bliss. There was Ruth Pinch and her beefsteak pudding, and Bella Wilfer and her cookery book.

"But it wasn't Bella and her cookery book John Harmon fell in love with," Mimi reminded me, "it was Bella and her curls."

She had me there. I murmured that some one had done an omelette—kidney omelette—in one of Arnold Bennett's novels, and that the picture was unforgettable.

"But she was a Circe at heart, and did it to enslave him. She wasn't just housewifely and happy."

With all her air of taking the argument easily, I felt a strain of earnestness in what she said. I wondered, as I rode along, if I had made her feel that I valued her for her loveliness rather than for the finer and deeper things which might develop through sacrifice. My father's words came back to me, "When you hold the soul of a woman in your hand, Jerry."

What did I know of Mimi's soul—I had talked to her for hours of my own aspirations, but she had told me little of hers. Did that prove she had no aspirations? Might there not be in her some quality I had missed, and which might mean more to me than any external charm? It was legitimate, of course, to want to save her from drudgery, but

should I try to save her from a share in the great tasks of life? If she was to be always silken and shining, might she not lose something of spiritual and moral fiber? Yet, it was I who had wanted to keep her enmeshed in softness.

With my dreams keyed now to what I would say to her when I saw her again, I rode on and up, reaching at last the wooded heights. The great trees were cathedral-like. I wished Mimi were with me. I felt that her mood would be exalted as mine. That our souls would meet and soar in such surroundings.

6

Mimi had promised to prepare a simple dinner. That meant, perhaps, a chicken roasted by Mrs Hayes, a vegetable or two, which Timothy would cook, there was delicious late corn in the garden; and there would be melons for dessert. I found myself anticipating it all as I set my face, that night, toward home. Mimi rested and radiant would welcome me, and the moment would come when I would tell her of the high thoughts I had had of her.

But it was not Mimi who welcomed me, but Timothy.

He came out of the kitchen door, as I dismounted, and said, "I'm frying some ham for your dinner, and do you want your eggs turned?"

"Where's Mrs. Chandler?"

"She ain't well, and she's lying down. And she don't want anything to eat."

"Not well?"—I was startled.

"No, sir. She came into the kitchen after the gentleman called, and told me what to get for you, and then she went in her room and she ain't been out."

"What gentleman, Timothy?"

"Well, he came in a big car, Mr. Chandler—while Ma and I were carrying the kettles up to our house, and he was just going away when I got back."

I did not wait to hear more, I strode through the living room, and opened the door beyond. Mimi lay on her bed, face downward. One arm, thrown out, clutched the pillow. Her hair was in disorder, and she wore one of the big gingham aprons which Mrs. Hayes had loaned her. I thought she was asleep. But she opened her eyes as I came in, and said, "I don't want any dinner, Jerry."

"Mimi," I demanded, "what's the matter?"

She sat up, and I saw then that she had been crying.

"Andy has been here," she said, "he found me in the kitchen, cutting up cabbages, and with things boiling over on the stove. He—he thought I was the maid, and asked me the way to the Chandler ranch—and I turned around—and he recognized me——"

I gave a quick exclamation, but she did not seem to hear me. "He—stood staring at me. And then he said: 'Good God,' and began to laugh, to *laugh* —" she beat a tight little fist on the pillow, "and—and after a while he said, 'so this is why you wouldn't let me come——' "

"The cad——"

She pushed the disordered hair back from her face with both hands. "Why shouldn't he laugh, Jerry? Why shouldn't he? I had talked of—high romance, and he found me a drudge, among my pots and pans."

"Mimi!"

"Oh, why not speak the truth, Jerry? Be honest? I've tried not to think it drudgery—but it is, it *is* —" she began to sob softly.

I was stabbed to the heart. I knew her pride. I knew her humiliation. And all I could say was, "My dear, I am sorry."

"Being sorry doesn't help," she did not look at me.

I sat down in a chair, and surveyed her moodily. "I suppose he'll tell the whole of St. Louis."

"No, he won't."

"How do you know?"

"I made him promise not to."

"Mimi, you didn't ask a favor of him?"

"I did. Why not?"

"It puts both of us—in his power," I could see my frowning face in Mimi's mirror.

"I know that, as well as you do, but it couldn't be helped."

After a tense silence, I said, "How did he happen to stay on? I thought he had left this part of the country long ago."

"He did go—and he came back. He leaves for France in two weeks—he wanted to say 'Good-bye' to me, Jerry."

Jealousy flamed, "He dared?"

"Yes."

"How long did he stay?"

"An hour, perhaps." She got off the bed, and began to brush her hair. Her cheeks showed white in the mirror and there were deep circles under her eyes.

"What else did he say, Mimi?"

She turned and faced me, "I might as well tell you. He—he asked me to go with him, Jerry."

"Mimi——"

She nodded, her lips were dry. "It—it was dreadful. It was like a nightmare—from which I shall never—wake up."

If I had taken her in my arms then, and comforted her! But I was raging. Andy with his money, with his insolence, with his air of a conqueror.

"And you let him stay—and make love to you ——?"

Her hand went up to her throat. "Do you really think that, Jerry?"

"He stayed an hour. You should have sent him away at once."

I hardly knew what I was saying. I was mad with the pain of it all. I could see Andy standing in the kitchen door—graceful, perfectly groomed, and Mimi in her gingham apron!

I was overthrown in that moment by the facts I had never faced. Mimi was not a fairy princess. Our house was not a shining palace. And Andy had found it out—and he had laughed!

CHAPTER XII.

1

I wish I might forget the things Mimi and I said to each other that night. We were young, hurt, humiliated, and each blamed everything on the other. Mimi had been, she felt, "fooled" by the whole situation. "You seemed so sure, Jerry. How could I know how awful it was?" And I had flung back. "Perhaps, you are sorry that you didn't marry Andy?" And she had retorted. "Perhaps I am!"

We were utterly crude, primitive—we did not care how our words stung.

At last, however, I began to come to my senses. "Mimi, Mimi, we are saying things which may separate us forever."

"Are we? I don't seem to care, Jerry. I'm not big enough to be the heroine of your romance. You need a perfect woman—and I'm—just human."

It ended by her shutting the door on me, and for a long time after that I could hear her crying.

I dread to write of the days which followed. Mimi and I met like strangers. Neither of us could forgive the hot words we had flung out in our anger. We hardened our hearts—nursed our grievances.

At last I could stand it no longer. I resolved to

send Mimi back to her mother. Anything would be better than this—to live under one roof like enemies.

I had enough money to make my plans possible. My story had been accepted and well paid for. "I want you to take this check, Mimi," I said to her, "and go to St. Louis. The winters up here are hard—and the change will be good for you."

"But what will you do, Jerry?"

"Stay on the job and write. I can get my meals at Mrs. Hayes', with the rest of them."

"Oh, how silly, Jerry." The way she said it sounded more like the old Mimi than any words she had uttered since that awful night. "You couldn't stand it to be alone. And anyhow I'm not going."

She spoke with an air of obstinacy. And she stuck to her decision. I felt, however, that she was held by pride, rather than by love or loyalty. She would not return to her own people with the effect of failure.

The autumn days came on quickly. There were some golden ones and others which were dreary and dark. At last the first snow drove the white flakes over the valleys.

I could see months ahead of us of isolation. I had a feeling of desperation. I could stand it for myself, but what of Mimi?

Yet, as the time went on, I began to find in my

little wife certain qualities which surprised me. There was a steadfastness, an adjustment to difficulties which were amazing, when one considered the butterfly life she had led. She systematized her housekeeping, and spent part of the check which I had received for my story as wages for Dora, who had returned home when the hotel closed. Timothy went to school, seven miles away, driving the rest of the children in the little car. The dancing lessons were given now in the living room with the rugs up, and there were tableaux and charades; stories told by the big stove, corn popped in the kitchen, and candy made in incredible quantities.

I was not always a part of the gay group. I was writing now, in dead earnest. I had kept Hayes on, and it added greatly to the expense. The men were hewing and hauling timber. I hoped that by intense industry I might relieve the financial situation. I had a feeling that I must make good, that I must win my own self-respect, before I could demand respect of Mimi.

For the thing which stung most was the knowledge that Mimi held me lightly as a dreamer of dreams. I was a lad who had loved, and had not known how to hold what I had won! I was poet, not much to be depended on in practical affairs!

One day as I sat at my desk I reached into an inner pocket for some papers. In taking them out I brought with them a small spool of sky-blue silk!

I set it before me on the desk and remembered the day I had bought it. That golden day when Mimi and I had walked together and when she had said, "I have saved all of your letters in a little box—" and I had called her "Dearest."

I wondered if she, too, remembered. I wanted to go to her, and ask. I was on my feet to do it when the door opened. "Lunch is ready, Jerry," she said.

I held out the little spool. "I was thinking of the day I bought it."

She looked down at it, as it lay in my hand. Not a muscle of her face changed. She was serene, indifferent. "Oh, what a romantic boy you are, Jerry." I wondered secretively if she had meant "romantic fool."

2

I came home some weeks later after a ride to a neighboring ranch to find such a change in our living-room that I stood, petrified, on the threshold.

The awful rug was gone, and some of the awful furniture. Gone were the awful pictures on the walls. As there was nothing to take their places the room had a sort of grim emptiness.

Mimi coming in, announced, "I couldn't live with it any longer. I thought we could sandpaper some of the pieces that are left, and put on a dark

stain—and we can do the floor. The children want to help—. You don't mind, do you?"

I didn't mind in the least. I even ventured, "There ought to be a fireplace. Perhaps, we can manage that."

"It would be heavenly." Mimi was standing in front of the high-shouldered stove. "And anyhow we've made a beginning."

It was some time after, that looking up from the barn, where I was at work, I saw a band of Indians approaching the house. I sent one of the men at once to Mimi—lest she be startled, and as soon as I could I followed.

I found one or two braves and a half dozen squaw women assembled in the kitchen. Mimi, with a flush on her cheeks and a sparkle in her eyes, was bargaining for the blankets they had brought, the baskets and beadwork.

"Jerry," she said, as she saw me, "aren't they charming? Look at these blankets."

They were most attractive in their blacks and grays, with touches of flaming red—there were baskets in all shapes and colors, a pair of antlers—a bearskin rug.

Mimi was buying everything—giving in exchange certain trinkets—a sparkling brooch, a tiny jeweled watch. The Indians knew the value of the jewels. They were no longer trustful savages. They had dealt long enough with white men to be shrewd.

"This for this," Mimi would say, and they would weigh the matter, and consider. When she produced at last a string of coral beads carefully carved, the eyes of one of the women brightened. She said something to the old chief. He held out his hands for the beads.

"Mimi," I said, "don't sell them. Let me pay."

She shook her head. "I'm doing this, Jerry."

I sat down and watched her. She drove a sharp bargain with the old chief—two of the lovely blankets, or no beads. At last he gave in, and presently the band went away, having had a drink of our new cider and some of Dora's doughnuts.

Mimi danced ahead of me like a child. "Everything is going to be simply darling," she assured me, and for an hour after that we were busy putting the things in place—transforming the living-room into delightful harmony—with the grays and blacks and reds—. "I'll put gray covers over that awful brocade," Mimi exulted—"and we'll tear the paper off the walls and tint them."

It was a task which took some weeks, and the climax came, when I set Hayes and all his men to work on the fireplace—building a great stone chimney, and making the mantel of a split oak log.

Hayes grumbled while he was doing it. "You'll freeze," he assured me. But we compromised by putting the big stove in the dining-room where

its heat overflowed, and kept the living-room at even temperature.

And now a fire blazed on our hearth, and Mimi and I sat in front of it night after night, I with my books and writing pad, and she with her eternal knitting. We had the effect, at least, of domesticity, although she knew and I knew that the thing which makes a hearth sacred was lacking.

It was about this time that I began to see that Mimi's pride was not a thin garment to be torn by adversity. It was, rather, a robe which could be worn with an air in the midst of hardship. It was Mimi's pride which had made this room restful and charming. It was her pride which kept her hair brushed and beautiful, and her hands smooth and white. It was her pride which gave to our dinners the effect of formality. We dined now on a little table drawn up in front of the fire, and it was Mimi who made squares of gray linen, and who put oranges or red apples in a gray and black bowl for a centerpiece. Whatever came, life must have for her its beauty. She could not live without it. She packed away many of the exquisite gowns she had brought, and altered others so that they were simple and appropriate.

I began to see that she was, in many ways, like my mother. They had, both of them, the sense that man may sink into savagery unless woman holds him to the things which make for order and dignity.

So as she sat by the fire, night after night, my wife became the symbol of something which I must strive for. I might win from her, perhaps, that which she had never given. She looked upon me now as a builder of airy castles. I must show myself able to erect firm foundations.

3

The knitting which kept Mimi busy was for the men who were at war in France. America was being called upon to do what she could for the refugees from Belgium and other invaded territory. Letters from Bernice told us that Andy had gone and that Lionel was going. "And I am going with him," Bernice said, "the blood of our ancestors calls us, Mimi."

Mimi had read the letter and had sat with her eyes fixed on the fire. "I know how Bernice feels," she said, "it was the home of our grandfathers."

It had been the home not only of the grandfathers, but of the grandmothers with the ball-gowns—the ones who had danced with Lafayette. No such blood flowed in my veins—yet I, too, was thrilled by the thought of Lafayette.

It was, I think, early in December that the idea began to form in my mind of going to France. I would win Mimi back by a heroic defense of her land, the land she loved. With my fatal sense of dramatization, I began to make pictures of myself

with the battlefield as a background. I could fight for Mimi's love. I might even die for it. I might, thus, redeem myself. I had become less than a hero in my own eyes, I might prove more than a hero in the eyes of the world.

There is no telling what I might have done while this mood possessed me if Hayes had not fallen ill, and two of the men left because of the loneliness.

I could get no one to take their places, so I was forced to do double duty, going shuttle-like from my desk to the work of the farm. My stories suffered because of my divided mind, and there were fewer acceptances from the editors. I came in at night dead-tired, beaten sometimes by storms, to find Mimi by the fire, quiet and composed, a purring pussy-cat or two on the hearth-rug, the table charmingly set, its orange and gray and black colorful against the golden background of flames.

Resting there, I seemed enclosed in a circle of peace. For that moment, I worked through the day. I wondered if Mimi knew how I worshipped her, as she sat, a tranquil figure, telling me the things she had read in the daily paper, but telling me nothing that was in her heart.

So December came, and Christmas. We were to have a tree for the small Hayeses. Hayes' illness had made Dora the only wage-earner in the family. The ranch supplied food and to spare for

every one, but if there were to be Christmas presents for the children, Mimi and I would have to provide them.

"I've a lot of little things," Mimi told me, "and there are yards and yards of silver ribbon on a dress I shall never wear. And we can make cherry clusters of cranberries, and pop-corn balls and chains."

"And on Christmas day, we will have the dinner here. Mrs. Hayes will come over and cook it——"

"Do you mean that you'll invite them to dine with us?"

"Of course," easily, "why not?"

Why not, indeed? But it was her initial introduction to democracy. In our first days on the ranch Mimi had looked upon the Hayeses as a queen might look upon her vassals. That she called them, now, her friends, was an evidence of a revolution in her social ideals.

"We want the biggest turkey ever," she informed me.

I laid my hand on her arm. I wanted to tell her how I adored her. She drew away, smiling but unapproachable. "We want the biggest turkey ever," she repeated, and I dropped my hand from her arm. "You shall have it," I said.

"And the biggest tree, Jerry?"

"Yes. I'll cut it myself."

But it was not, after all, the biggest tree. We

chose the one we wanted several days later, as we rode over a new trail to get our first wide view of the snow-capped range.

It was late afternoon, cold, stimulating, and with the sun beginning to slant across the mountains, when we came upon a little tree, which stood apart from the others on the very top of a hill. It was a spruce, perfect in its proportions, and tipped with silvery growth. But it was not mere symmetry which caught our eyes. It was, rather, the effect given it by the sunset sky back of it—through every tip and twig and branch blazed a red glory, until they shone and sparkled as if lighted by a thousand candles.

"Jerry, look!" Mimi cried, "did you ever see anything so—wonderful?"

We watched until the light faded, and the little tree was stripped of its splendor.

"How lonely it seems," Mimi said, "perhaps it will never be lighted that way again. That was just its moment."

"Why not give it another moment, Mimi? Why not make it our Christmas tree?"

She caught at that. Our imagination met. We saw the tree triumphant in its Christmas beauty.

In the evenings which followed, Mimi dressed a doll for Susie Hayes and one for Mary Hayes, and with these finished she produced a doll which

so resembled herself that I stared at it in amazement.

"I am going to make it look like my peacock picture," she told me, "and send it to Bernice to be sold at the French Bazaar. She wrote to me about it. And since then I've been trying to think of something that would create a sensation, and this will. They'll auction it off. I sent to Denver for a doll with hair of the right color, and I have put some of my own with it."

So artfully had she mingled her own hair with the hair of the doll's wig, that the effect was that of the headdress of the painting. Lacking a jewelled comb, she had made one of the eye of a peacock's feather. With water-colors she had given the doll's insipid countenance something of her own vividness.

"I shall make the dress exactly like the picture, Jerry. It will sell and they will get a lot of money for it. I know that crowd. They will say, 'It is Mimi Le Brun, to the life.' I think I'll tell Bernice to ask Olga to lend the painting. I wouldn't ask her for the world, but Bernice could."

I was still looking at the doll. "If I'll pay you enough for your charity, will you let me keep it?"

She shook her head. "You have me——"

I caught her hand, "Have I really, Mimi?"

"Well, haven't you—?" but her tone was remote,

and she went on immediately. "Wait until you see her dressed, Jerry. I've used the sash of one of my gowns—" her hand was withdrawn.

But I was not to be put off. "Let me see where you cut your hair."

She took out a pin or two and bent her head. On the very top the curls were short. With that tawny mane so close to me and with her eyes hidden, I lost my fear of her. I swept her into my arms.

She struggled to free herself, and at last I let her go. "Don't touch me," she said breathlessly. "It is absurd, Jerry, after all that has happened to act as if we were lovers."

"Nothing has happened which cannot be forgiven."

"It isn't a question of forgiveness, is it? It is a matter, it seems to me, of disillusionment."

She picked up the doll. "I shall have to make her slippers. Do you think you could manage high little wooden heels, Jerry?"

I was helpless before the perfection of her manner. She would have no quarrel. We sat by the fire with an effect of harmony. Yet, we were as far apart as the poles.

When the peacock gown was finished, Mimi sent the doll away, and in due time a letter came from Bernice.

"My dear, you should have seen the bidding. It sold for a *thousand dollars.* Olga got it, or rather

the man she is to marry got it. It stood on a table in front of the portrait, and everybody was simply mad about it. I wanted it more than anything—but I hadn't the money."

When Mimi looked up from the letter, I saw that her eyes were blazing, "So Olga got it," she said, in a stifled voice, "Olga. She gets everything. She got—grandfather."

She was like a hurt child. The memory of her grandfather was always a poignant one.

That night I wrote to Olga. I told her that I wanted the doll. And that I would mail her the check for it. The next morning, by telephone, I sold a piece of timber-land to a neighbor who had wanted it, for a thousand dollars.

4

Two days before Christmas I went up into the woods to cut the little tree. I had decided to walk and to take no one with me, for the men were busy, and the tree would be a light weight for my young strength.

It was clear when I started, but with a heavy slate gray sky which seemed to press close to the mountain tops.

"It looks like snow," I said.

"Why not cut a tree nearer home, Jerry?" Mimi asked me.

"You liked that one, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, that settles it," I stood smiling at her, wrapped to the ears, with Jason at my heels.

The big dog wanted to go with me, but I would not let him. Mimi and Dora were alone, a storm was coming on. I would feel safer if Jason were in the house. Up through these mountains came, now and then, fugitives from justice. When our farm men were busy on the lower level, they were hard to reach.

So Jason stayed, standing wistfully beside Mimi, as I went away, and the next time I saw him my dulled eyes took him for a coyote or for a starved wolf strayed from the timber.

The wind was at my back, and I could feel the force of it bearing me up like broad wings as I made the ascent. I dreaded to think that it would beat me back when I faced it on my return.

It changed, after a time, however, and snow came with it—light flakes at first, then the steady drive of them. I was glad of the stillness after the roar of the wind, and I was glad, too, of the beauty, with the slender aspens, stretching bare arms to receive their white mantles, the evergreens, their dark loveliness half-hidden by a pallid veil.

I remember I was in a somewhat solemn mood. I had arrived at a fixed resolve. When the first of the year came I would sail for France. This would release Mimi. She could go back to St.

Louis without a sense of humiliation. The sale of the ranch would keep her for a time, in apparent affluence. People need never know that there had been no shining palace. The incident would be, in a sense, closed. When I returned it would be time enough to take up my own problems, and I might never come back.

But whatever came, Mimi would be proud of me. That was, after all, the peak of my desire. Perhaps, when I left her, she would see me as something besides a fool and a failure. I might even do something in France which would set me apart from other men.

So, weighing it all, I came at last to where the little tree stood. It was half-wrapped in a blanket of snow, but I knew it by its isolation, and by its perfect lines.

I stripped off my outer jacket and went to work. The sound of blows echoed dully in the snow-laden air. I worked with a will, and at last the tree surrendered. It came down with a sort of rushing sigh, which smote my heart. Would, after all, the glory we would give it compensate for the years it might have lied radiant on the mountain side?

The storm was increasing when I started down with my load. The snow, like a thick white curtain, hid the high hills, hid everything, indeed, so that at last I began to fear I was not following the unfamiliar trail.

I think, then, I must have stumbled; a gopher hole, perhaps, or a sliding rock. I was aware of a crashing fall, of grinding, sickening pain, then the white curtain came down upon me, and shut out the world.

CHAPTER XIII.

1

I came out of my long moments of unconsciousness to find the scene lighted by a pearly glimmer. Only a few flakes of snow were flying, and as I raised myself on my elbow, I could see that the tree which I had carried had been pitched by my fall over my head, and at some distance down the hill. It was held from further descent by a dry old pine which had rotted long ago, and had been blown to the ground. There the two trees lay, the living and the dead, locked in each other's arms.

The pain in my leg was intense. I tried to raise myself and could not, although I strove with teeth set, and the blood pounding in my temples. At last I gave it up, and dropped back, the cold enveloping me like an icy sheet. My situation was desperate. If I called, there was no one to hear. My one hope was that my delay in reaching home might make Mimi anxious, and that she would send the men to search for me.

She would not I know, begin to worry at once, for we did not dine until seven, and I often made the rounds of the barns before going up to the house. I fumbled in my pockets for a match and looked at my watch. It was half-past five. An

hour at least must elapse before Mimi would miss me.

And in the meantime, what? Would the cold get me? Would the timber-wolves slink close and gaze at me with phosphorescent eyes? Would the coyotes throw back their heads and howl—waiting?

Oh, I had imagination enough, lying there, to see the thing as it might be. I had heard tales of men lost on those high hills.

Well, I had at least my box of matches. With my mind working feverishly, I planned what I would do. If they came—timber-wolf or coyote—I would build a fire. A burning bunch of dry grass dropped down on that old dead tree, and it would become alive again. The little Christmas bush backed by such a conflagration would burn, too—and the resin in its veins would snap and snarl.

Prowling beasts would draw away from it—and something of its warmth would reach me. I needed that warmth, I ached with the cold, yet delayed to strike a match, lest in some way my plan might fail and I should be left without hope.

As I waited, my mind seemed cleared, suddenly, of the cobwebs which had cluttered it. I was facing death, and what did all the things matter which had meant so much to me a little while ago? Nothing really mattered now but Mimi and my father, and the memory of my mother. And what would

my death do to Mimi, if it came? She would be free—free to marry Andy.

That was my first despicable thought of her—and then, thank God, I saw her by my hearthstone, steadfast in the midst of the chaos which had threatened us. With a clairvoyance which comes, perhaps, at such moments, I believed in her love for me, as I had not believed since the day that Andy had learned the truth; and we had said those unforgettable things to each other. The barrier had been of my own making, not of hers. I had erected it by my unbelief—and she, wise as women are, had known.

I would live to tell her. Death should not claim me until I had told her. Desperately, I raised myself on my elbow and shouted. My voice returned to me, mockingly. My leg now was numb, the blood seemed to be slowly congealing in my veins. If I lost consciousness my last chance would be gone.

Again I looked at my watch. It was after six. Mimi would at last be wondering if I had returned to the farm. She might, at this very moment, be telephoning to the men. They would be starting out. A fire would guide them.

With sudden energy, I tore up great handfuls of the dried and brittle grasses, put a match to them, and flung them down on the two trees. There was a hiss as the snow melted, a sharp crackle as

the branches caught, then a bright banner waved against the blackness of the night. I felt its heat—stretched out my hands. The light cut a wide circle in the shadows. Under it the snow was pink, a great rock was bathed in gold, the trunks of the trees were like pillars of ebony.

Thus, was our Christmas tree again illumined. Not with the holiday glitter of silver balls and tinsel chains, but as a flaming beacon!

For a moment my mind was free from all distress, the warmth was comforting, hope was in my heart, high up on the hills that banner would be seen and help would come.

I think after that I fell into a sort of stupor. I fancied I sat by my own hearth, and warmth came from it; that Mimi and I talked together, and I told her all that had been in my mind.

I opened my eyes, at last, to find the fire had died down to a steady glow, which lighted the aisles between the ebony pillars, so that the whole scene was like the setting of a play. Then, against that background, showed, suddenly, a sinister shape. It swept silently towards me, revealing, on near approach, a bushy tail, pointed nose, eyes that were mere slits of liquid green.

The fire halted the creature for a moment, but it skirted the fire. I tried to rise, but fell back. I shouted, but the sounds I made seemed faint and hollow. I reached for my knife, and could not get

at my pocket. I shielded my face with my arm, as I felt, finally, the impact of the great body.

I thought then that the end had come. What chance had I against this panting brute and the others which would follow? Again, I tried to get at my knife, and, thank God, I could not, for at that moment there rang in my ears a glad bark which was never born in the throat of a wolf, the bark of a dog which has found its master. It was Jason who stood over me, quivering, whining, trying to lick my cheek, loving me.

2

Mimi had begun to be uneasy early in the evening. From the window of her own room she could, in clear weather, see the trail which I had followed, but now the mountain was hidden by a thick curtain of snow. As the storm increased Dora tried to reassure her. There were many such storms, she said. Mimi called up the men at the barns, and learned that I had not come in. Timothy, arriving at the momemt, offered to go and look for me. Mimi would not let him, so he built a great fire on the hearth and she told him stories. Jason would not stay by the fire. He put his nose to the crack of the front door and refused to leave. At six he sat up, cocked his ears, and barked and whined.

"I thought he heard you, Jerry, so I let him out,

and he was away like a shot. Then we waited, Tim and I, but you did not come or Jason either. The snow had stopped, so I went to my room and looked out. It was too dark to see the mountain, but there seemed to be a great star hanging low in the sky, and as I watched it grew bigger and bigger, and then I knew it must be a fire and that you had lighted it, so I called up the men and sent them after you."

The men met Jason halfway. I had tied my handkerchief to his collar; and it was he who led them back to where I lay.

They made a rude stretcher of the blankets they had brought, and placed me on it; then with the carefulness of those who are the guardians of the forest, they beat out the fire, and heaped snow on it. Thus, the little tree, which was to have lighted our Christmas, lay alone under a white pall.

I fainted again before they got me home, and opened my eyes to see Mimi's face above me. It was very white, and the eyes were frightened. And it was those frightened eyes which I took with me into my dreams.

For I was very ill. My leg was broken, and the exposure had brought on pneumonia. I came out of my delirium now and then to worry about Mimi, and to try to tell her of the things I had thought while I lay half-frozen on the mountain side. I was always trying, too, to tell her about the ranch,

and what Uncle Jerry had said of it. "He told me it was a shining palace," I kept saying, "I didn't know it was a shack like this."

And she would soothe me: "Perhaps, it is a shining palace, Jerry," and try to smile at me, but always her eyes were frightened.

Mrs. Hayes came down and helped with the nursing, but she had to go back to her own sick man. Dora had all she could do with the housework. The men from the barns did what they could, but they were awkward and uncouth. So it was Mimi whom I saw day and night, tireless, with deep shadows under the frightened eyes, her hair brushed back from her white face, her simple gowns faded from many washings.

One day I caught her hand as she bent over me, "Where is the Mimi of the peacock portrait?"

She tried to speak lightly, "She has flown away. A fairy waved a wand and changed her into a—little brown hen."

"You mean that a country clod turned her into a—Cinderella."

"Hush, Jerry."

It was after this that I drifted away from realities into a world which had to do with appalling heights which I could never scale,—a world in which a thousand Christmas candles burned with a heat which consumed me, a world in which Mimi

with her frightened eyes receded, and two women in white took her place.

Nurses! They did for me the things that Mimi had not known how to do. Made me unspeakably comfortable with their expertness. There were doctors, too, besides the one who looked after the sick of our community. These visiting doctors were rather dominant and splendid, and the nurses jumped at a word from them. They listened to my breathing with tubes which they stuck in their ears; they tapped my chest and back with expert fingers, to catch the dull echoes from my congested lungs.

It seemed to me that with the coming of these doctors and nurses everything in the house had changed. There was an air of luxury—conveniences for the sick-room magically appeared—when the door of the living-room opened, it glowed with a new brightness. Mimi drifting in and out wore some of her silken negligee. It was all puzzling, and I did not try to solve the puzzle. These things were, perhaps, but a part of my dream, and I should wake to find squalor and ugliness still about me.

It was at this time that I lost the nurses, lost the doctors, lost Mimi, lost all consciousness of the room I was in, the rooms beyond, and the mountains that encompassed us. I seemed to wander on the shores of a vast blue sheet of water, shouting desperately to the skies, *"Father!"*

And when I had shouted until I was hoarse, and

was too tired to struggle on, suddenly my father answered, "Jerry, my son."

Of course, it was only a dream, but it quieted me. I leaned on his strength as I had leaned as a boy. I seemed to hear his voice saying the simple prayers, the lovely grace.

He seemed, too, to talk to Mimi. Yet I knew they had never met—that what I heard were phantom conversations.

"I wrote to Olga—and she sent me the money . . ."

Had I dreamed that ? Oh, I must have dreamed it.

And again: *"If there is a God, why doesn't He let Jerry and me be happy?"*

And that long talk which seemed to drift in from the other room out of a long silence.

"He was always a fanciful child, Mimi."

"I thought he lied to me."

"His mother thought that, too, in his early years. His imagination embroidered everything."

"Well, I blamed him."

"It hurt him as much as you."

"How do you mean?"

"All his castles tumbled. There was only you left, Mimi."

"And I failed him."

"Do you think you did?"

"Yes. I stayed because I was ashamed to go back."

"Yet, you do love him?"

"I know it now. Oh, he was such a darling, always. Trying to fit me into this life when he wanted me, more than anything, to be a princess in a castle. Don't you see that was the trouble? I knew he wanted the castle and the princess in it. And I couldn't be that, not up here. So I shut him out of my life——"

Her voice died away in a whisper. I was aware of the nurse coming in. I opened my eyes and said, "I have been dreaming."

She had a pleasant throaty laugh. "I should say you had waked up while I was gone." She laid a finger on my pulse, smoothed my pillow, went to the door and said, "He is conscious. Do you want to come in?"

And there was my father, no longer a figure of fantasy, but in the flesh, and he was saying, "Jerry, my dear son——"

And Mimi was on her knees beside the bed. "Oh, Jerry, you *peach*—to come back like this—I thought you had drifted away from me forever."

3

One day I said to Mimi, "Did you really ask Olga for money? Or did I dream it?"

"I did. She wrote a note to you on Christmas day, Jerry, and sent back the doll, and I read the

note because I thought it might need an answer. Would you like to have me read it to you now?"

She brought it, presently, to my bedside. "My dear Jerry," Olga said, "I want Mimi to have the doll, and I don't want you to pay for it. I wish we might all be friends. I am going to be married soon, and I think I have never had quite this kind of happiness before. It makes me want to reach out and take the hand of everyone I have seemed to harm, or who has been my enemy."

"May the New Year bring you your heart's desire, Jerry, as I am sure it is bringing mine, and will you give my love to Mimi? Perhaps, she doesn't want it, but I'll send it just the same, and if there is anything I can ever do for either of you, let me know."

Mimi laid down the letter. "It came on Christmas morning, Jerry, when everything was *dreadful.* A blizzard was raging, and the doctor said you ought to have nurses, and I was almost frantic. Then one of the men brought the mail and Olga's letter was in it, and the doll. And somehow, as I read the note, I began to feel that Olga meant what she said. That she really wanted to help. So I just sat down and wrote to her—and I told her the truth. All about how things are here."

"My dear girl——"

"It *had* to be the truth, Jerry, or nothing. I simply couldn't accept things under false pretenses.

And pride doesn't amount to much when death stares us in the face. Do you know, Jerry, that in a way I was *glad* to tell her? I was like drawing a long free breath after being in a stifled room."

There was a radiance about her which was like that of the old days.

"Oh, Jerry, Jerry," she said, "if I had only faced the truth before."

"If we had both faced it," I said.

She curled her fingers about mine. "Well, all that's over now, isn't it? And we'll start straight."

But we didn't start straight. For what she said after a moment's silence altered the whole aspect of things for me.

"You see, Jerry, there was no one else I could ask. Mother was in Florida with Aunt Bernice, and I couldn't have told her anyhow. I insisted that it must be a loan. I thought when you were well that we might pay it back——"

Dense blackness seemed to engulf me. How could I pay anything? Once more my worries weighed me down.

I heard Mimi saying, anxiously, "Oh, I'm afraid I've talked too much."

I managed to smile at her. "Not a bit, my dearest. But I'll try to sleep."

I couldn't sleep, however. Questions of ways and means beat against my brain. I must, of course, sell the ranch. And why not? It had brought me

nothing but poverty, humiliation, unhappiness. Mimi and I would seek some other field.

I was not, it seemed, ever again to play the part of hero on the stage of life. My leg would mend, but not for me would be the glory of war. Four manuscripts had come back to me during my illness. I had made Mimi tell me, although she had tried to hide the truth.

So, what was I after all? Neither warrior bold, nor budding genius. I was simply a sick boy, who, with eyes fixed on the stars, had lost the road.

The way seemed very dark before me, and in the darkness I found myself whispering, "Give me courage. God, give me strength—" and strength seemed to flow into me before I slept.

The next day I talked the situation over with my father.

"I want to sell the ranch."

"Why think about it now, Jerry? Wait until you are well."

"I must think about it. Mimi and I can't stay here. I can't work, and I can't afford to hire Hayes."

"I can work," my father said, "and I can stay on. I am not needed at home."

"What about your church?"

"They ought to have a younger man. They do not know it, but my absence will give them a chance to find out."

"And you are willing to let go so easily?"

"It will not be easy. But it may be best. My people are loyal, but my day will soon be over, and I'd rather leave them while they love me."

He was as strong and steadfast as a fine old oak. I envied him and said so. "I wish I could face life as you do, father."

He smiled down at me. "We learn to face things as the years go on."

"Yet, you don't seem to be unhappy."

"We are never really unhappy if we stop thinking of happiness as the goal."

"What is the goal?"

"The happiness of others."

I was impatient at that and told him so. "I mean to have happiness for myself."

I cannot tell how much, in the days that followed, my inaction fretted me. As soon as I could sit up the nurses went away. Dora did the housework. Timothy played the part of valet, fetching and caring for me, tirelessly. Mimi and my father went down each morning to look after the affairs of the farm. They were a picturesque pair, for my father had doffed his black coat and was in corduroy, with a fur jacket and a fur cap that covered his ears. Mimi, too, wore riding clothes. She seemed eternally busy and my father sang her praises.

"She can get more work out of the men than you

or I. She has them all in the workshop now, making the fittings for the new poultry house."

"Why do we need a new poultry house?"

"She is going to have lots of chickens in the spring. She can sell them in Denver at good prices."

"But we may not be here in the spring."

"Have you said that to Mimi?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"She doesn't know that the ranch is mortgaged. She doesn't know the desperateness of my financial condition."

"Why don't you tell her?"

"I hate to burden her with it until I have to. And there's no chance of a sale until spring."

"But in the meantime she is going on with things—I think I should talk it over with her if I were you, Jerry."

"I will some day."

Yet, I found myself putting it off, and so February passed and March came. And still I sat inactive by the fire. I wore a dressing gown which Mimi had made for me out of one of her gorgeous wraps. It had a coppery gleam, and matched, Mimi said, the flames of our open fire.

"I can almost warm my hands at it, Jerry."

"I am not sure that I like to wear it."

"Why not?"

"It is too fine for a man. And you ought to be sitting here by the fire."

"With a broken leg?"

"You know I didn't mean that. But you ought to be the one to wear grand gowns."

"I'd rather ride down to the farm and see my darling hens. Some of them are so fussy and cross, but they are getting to know me, and you should hear them crooning."

She was much interested, too, in the colts and calves; and the lambs, she said, were adorable.

"With their weak little legs, Jerry. Do you know I had never seen a baby lamb?"

She brought up to the house a whole family of new kittens, and gave them one of the Indian baskets. The mother cat looked like a lovely tigress, but she was a friendly sort, and I liked to have her there on the hearth with her enchanting family to keep me company.

To shorten my days, I tried to write a little. Yet, the thing had somehow lost its savor. I felt that I hated the tools of my trade—pen and pencil—typewriter. To write was, after all, a dry-as-dust existence. I wanted to touch life. To ride with Mimi up the hills. To feel my horse under me. The wind in my face!

For spring was upon us. The air was like wine, warm, sweet wine that had yet a tang to it. The valley was all silver, emerald and amethyst, the

hills dark green or pale gold as the light clouds passed over them.

There was the blood of men who had tilled the soil in my veins, and for the first time I was aware of it. My forefathers had planted seed and harvested crops. They had been English yeomen, loving their low wide houses, the hospitality of it all, the freedom.

The four seasons had meanings for such men that they could not have for men of the town. What did the people who lived shut in by steel skyscrapers know of the quickened life of the countryside in the spring, of the abundance of the harvest in the fall? What did they know, who spent their nights in electric-lighted streets, of crescent moons in rose twilights, of hunter's moons above frozen fields? What did they know of a robin's note at dawn, the hoot of an owl on a thick summer night? Our poets were writing of smokestacks and of brick pavements, of the beat of machinery —of the miseries of huddled humanity.

My pulses pounded. Oh, the thing to do would be to stay here and learn the lore of the land, and then some day to write about it—as those old poets of England had written—. And I must write so that the people who had imprisoned themselves should come streaming out from their crowded cities to find the beauty of which I sang!

I was filled with the idea. I did not reflect that

I was again building castles. I forgot the drudgery, the sordid things, the discouragements. I wanted to talk it over with Mimi. I wanted to tell my father that I would stay on the ranch and work, and out of my working build the structure of my masterpiece!

But my father was not at home. He had been asked to preach in a schoolhouse some miles away. And Mimi came in tired.

She stood at one side of the fire and looked down at me.

"I ought to dress, Jerry. But I am worn out. I think it is my punishment for calling you a barbarian when you didn't want to put on your dinner coat. I haven't even energy enough to comb my hair.

"I like it as it is."

"Really, Jerry?" her voice was wistful.

"Really."

She was wearing her bright locks tied with a ribbon, as on the first day when I had seen her in the wood. She had taken off her coat and her silk shirt was worn thin by many washings. For the rest, she was in gray corduroy, with her deerskin leggings.

"How our theories fail, Jerry," she went on, after a short silence. "I thought that what we did in St. Louis ought to rule the world. But after a day like today, clothes don't seem to matter."

"You shouldn't have kept at your work so long."

"There were things to do. And it wasn't just the work—this afternoon one of the little lambs died."

Her lip quivered. She could not talk about it. She was very tender-hearted.

At dinner she tried to make conversation, but found it hard to keep awake. Dora had set the table on the hearth, between us. There were no flowers or fruit for decoration. Mimi had been too busy for such details, and I had been too indifferent. As for Dora, she had no time for the esthetic. And she liked to fry our steaks and chops. I had an invalid's appetite and wished for something more delicate. But Mimi ate with the zest of one who labors in the open air.

After dinner Mimi crumpled up in her big chair on the hearth and went to sleep. The kittens were asleep, too, and the old cat, in their Indian basket. Only I kept lonely vigil.

As I looked at my wife with her disordered hair, the old silk shirt, the mud on her corduroys, my mind went back to her as she had been that last night in Olga's ballroom—like a rose, perfumed, exquisite. She had belonged to that life, and not to this.

I wanted to stay up there in the hills—but it wouldn't be fair to Mimi. I wanted to live, to feel, and write out of the fullness of experience. But, in the meantime, what of Mimi? Would she

be dulled by the difficulties we might encounter? Lose youth and loveliness in my struggle to achieve?

The pendulum swung back and forth; myself . . . Mimi, myself . . . Mimi, myself . . . Mimi . . . ! Finally, it seemed to tick to the tune of the things my father had said to me. *"The goal is—the happiness of others."*

A log fell on the hearth, and Mimi opened her eyes. "I am as bad as the pussy-cats," she said, "I can't keep awake when it is nice and warm."

"Go to bed, dearest, and get your rest."

"But I like it here with you and the pussy-cats —" she sat up and untied the ribbon that bound her hair. "The only time I want a maid is when I am tired. I'd like to be brushed and combed without having to raise a hand to do it," she shook out her red-gold mane.

"You ought to have a maid. You ought to have everything to make life easy."

She spoke with a touch of impatience. "Oh, no, Jerry, why should everything be easy for me, when it is so hard for others? I've had a letter from Bernice. She is scrubbing floors in a canteen in France—with men going by the door, dead and dying, yet, I cried today over a dead—lamb."

"It—it is dreadful over there, Jerry. I can't bear to read about it. And we ought to be helping

them, and we aren't. And why should I worry if I have to work?"

"But I worry."

"Don't, please. Do you think if I were not up here I should be playing around in St. Louis? I should be in France, Jerry, scrubbing floors with Bernice."

I stared into the fire. "I might have gone if it hadn't been for my leg. I had planned to do it, Mimi."

"And leave me?"

"Not here, Mimi. At that time, I thought it might be a solution of our problems. You could go back to St. Louis, and no one need ever know that our dreams had not come true——"

Dead silence, then she came over and knelt beside my chair. "I—I am *glad* you broke your leg, Jerry, if you were thinking such thoughts as that. And you might have died—for France."

"I'd much rather live for you, Mimi. But it doesn't sound very heroic to say it."

"I don't want you to be a hero. I'm not a heroine. It is much nicer to be just—human," she laid her cheek against mine.

After a moment, she drew away from me. "Do you see this letter?" She flicked a finger towards the breast pocket of her silk shirt, from which an envelope protruded.

"Yes."

"It's from Andy. Shall I read it to you? Perhaps you won't like all of it. Perhaps I shan't read all of it. But I felt you ought to know what he had written."

He had, it seemed, sent her his picture—Lafayette Escadrille—and he was, in his uniform, very cocky and handsome. He wrote with the effect of an apology, but I could see behind the words all of his egotism, his assurance. "I am afraid I offended you, Mimi. But I wanted to make you happy. Perhaps, Chandler can do it, but I doubt it. You're a good sport. I'll say that. To stick it out——"

Mimi stopped there, and sat back on her heels. "Oh, I'm going to burn it and not read any more. I wonder what he thinks he is? King Cophetua?"

"Read the rest."

"It sounds much worse than I thought, Jerry."

"I don't care how it sounds."

"It may hurt——"

"I've been hurt before," grimly.

"Well, he says 'to stick it out in that God-forsaken place.' "

She laid down the letter to discuss that. "It isn't God-forsaken, Jerry. So why should we care?"

"I care. I am going to take you away from it, Mimi."

"No," sharply, "I won't go."

"Why not?"

"Because we've got to see it through, Jerry."

"But if it is going to make a drudge of you—rob you of your youth and beauty?"

She made a little gesture of impatience—"Aren't there other things besides youth and beauty? Jerry, I might be a nymph or a dryad for all you think of my mind and soul."

"It is your soul I love, Mimi."

"Is it? Then don't talk so much about my looks." She leaned forward above the fire and dropped Andy's letter, bit by bit, into the flames. The kittens, who had waked, watched her from their basket with bright eyes. When the letter had gone up in smoke, Mimi tore the picture across and laid it, too, on the coals. Andy's handsome countenance writhed for a moment in the heat, then faded into a gray charred wisp.

Mimi turned and faced me, her cheeks scarlet. "There," she said, "that's the last of him."

CHAPTER XIV

1

It was early in April that my father was called home by the illness of my grandmother. A telegram from Aunt Mary informed him that he must come at once.

He was much disturbed. "I hate to leave you, Jerry."

I tried to smile at him. "We shall get along all right." But I was not so sure. Hayes was still unable to take hold of things, and I dreaded the thought of added burdens for Mimi. I felt that my life of inactivity must cease; that I must get to the lower level and direct the men. Mimi would thus be saved the strain and stress, and I would feel myself once more an important figure in the affairs of the farm.

I shall never forget the charm of that first morning when I rode with Mimi down into the valley. The ranch was beautiful with bloom and teeming with new life. Whole regiments of ducklings were on their way to the streams which flowed cold from the mountains. The old hens marshalled battalions of chickens. The little pigs, russet and slant-eared, squealed vociferous welcome; the young Holsteins, their clear white banded with black, came

confidingly to meet us. The capricious colts took to their heels at our approach, then charged back to the fence to be petted. As for the lambs and pigeons, they were, to use Mimi's extravagant phrase, "simply heavenly." As she stood in the clear sunshine, she made an enchanting picture, with the lambs crowding close, the pigeons circling above her head.

And what shall I say of all that lovely world about us? The streams singing as they rushed down from the high peaks? The mountains, their white tops set like mammoth magnolias in bouquets of gold and chrysoprase, the valleys circling them with ribbons of jade?

I fought against the thought of leaving it all. Here was my domain. Here was beauty, inspiration, the promise of a future.

We made our rounds so slowly that when the noon-hour arrived there was still much to be done. So we had our lunch brought in a basket to one of the big hay barns, through whose wide doors the sun streaming in filled the shadowy spaces with amber light.

We sat on heaped-up mounds of dry alfalfa to eat our sandwiches. From the rafters the pigeons fluttered down to be fed—lovely creatures, some of them with snowy plumage, others iridescent, one of them a tawny fellow with an upturned ruff.

To many of them Mimi had given names. Pierrot, if you please, was the tawny one. "Because he is such a clown," Mimi explained. "It helped a lot when you were sick to have them love me. Do you know, Jerry, that until I came here I had never had a pet? I had never spent a moment of my life in the real country. My grandfather had an estate on the North Shore, and we went there in summer or abroad. Mother adored the French resorts, and we stayed in the big hotels."

Pierrot fluttered to her shoulder. She broke off a bit of bread and fed him. "I should hate to think, Jerry, that a child of mine should be deprived of this."

A child of Mimi's! The wonder of the thought flooded me with a warmth greater than that of the sun. Yet, I dared not tell her what I felt lest I break the spell of the moment.

She went on, musingly, "A child, it seems to me, should know a world like this—not a man-made world of high buildings, but a world like the one we have seen this morning—with all the little ducks going down to swim, and the darling old hens fussing over their chicks, and our precious pussy-cat and her chickens. And I never knew. Jerry, I sometimes feel as if I were a Columbus discovering a continent."

As she leaned towards me, bright as the dawn, I was aware of her, for the first time, as a goddess-

woman, one who belonged to ripe fields and fruitful orchards, to the sea, the sky, the stars!

I had never before thought of her like that. She had seemed so much a part of the background against which she had moved as a girl that I had not been able to separate her from it. Even when I had brought her to the ranch, I had hoped I might keep her sheathed in luxury. I had not wanted her to share the common lot. What had she to do with hardness?

Yet, she had found for herself that which I had never found for her—the beauty of age-old experience. Ignoring the sordidness, she had discovered the essential. All about her was life in its superlative expression, and she had interpreted its meaning.

Even then I could not quite believe in the amazing transformation. For, after all, was she not Mimi Le Brun? Whose pride had made me dress for dinner? Whose humiliation had been complete when our poverty had been revealed to Andy? Who had flung back at me my dreams?

So I said, "Would you hate to leave it?"

"Leave what, Jerry?"

"The ranch."

"Why should we leave it?"

"I am afraid we can't afford to stay."

I saw the brightness struck from her face as if by a blow. "What do you mean?"

I told her. Of our financial difficulties. Of the mortgages. Of my thought that if we went to New York I might make a living by my pen. If we sold the ranch we could be, at least for a time, comfortable.

"Oh, comfortable," she flung out, "is that all you think about, Jerry?"

I flushed. "I want you to have an easier life, Mimi."

"Like Curlylocks on a cushion—? Well, I don't want it. Jerry, why didn't you tell me all this before?"

"Because I hoped that I might save you from worry. I felt that I had dragged you low enough."

"Jerry," her voice was sharp, "don't."

I had no words for that, and a silence fell between us. Pierrot was again on Mimi's shoulder, his tawny plumage matching, in that amber light, the tawny flame of her own locks.

At last Mimi said, hardly above a whisper, "My marriage to you has not dragged me down. It has lifted me up, Jerry."

Oh, who could have expected this of the girl whom I had loved because of the proud lift of her head, her delicate poise, her peacock's feather? Here was a womanliness which seemed to enfold me. It was as if my soul was garmented with light.

Scarcely able to speak for the emotion which

overwhelmed me, I stammered, "Tell me what you mean, Mimi."

"I can't analyze it. I only—know. Something wonderful has waked in me. I first knew it when they brought you home to me. I could never go back to the old desires, the old ambitions."

She was kneeling now beside me. "Oh, Jerry, if you had *died*," she breathed, and hid her face against my coat.

I smoothed her hair. Pierrot fluttered up and out into the sunlight. Except for the pigeons who cooed among the rafters, we were alone among the golden shadows. "Mimi," I whispered, "I did not die, because the good Lord let me live—for this——"

2

Well, after that, I poured out my heart to her. I told her of my aspirations. Of my sense of unutterable failure. "I've been a dreamer of dreams. Perhaps, even now I am dreaming something which cannot come to pass."

"Nothing can fail if we work—together."

It was settled then and there that we should stay on the ranch. That some day it should be a palace. Our faith would build it—not in a month or a year, but in the years to come. For our immediate needs there was a stretch of timber-land which we

must sacrifice, and if the crops were good, we might tide over the winter.

"But why look forward until the winter?" Mimi demanded, "we will live each day to the limit."

So her courage sustained me. Nothing seemed impossible. Nothing was indeed impossible with such faith behind it.

In May my grandmother died, and in June my father came back to us, and brought with him Aunt Mary. The cherry orchards were red with fruit when they arrived, and I told Aunt Mary, "the cherries match your red cape. You must wear it often."

"Do you know," she told me, "that towards the last my mother liked to have me wear it? She said it warmed her."

Aunt Mary and my father were not to return to the parsonage. The young preacher who had taken my father's place had proved worthy of the mantle which was so gladly bequeathed to him. My father was to preach in the schoolhouse on the mountain. And he was to help with the work on the ranch. Hayes was better, but would be employed for the summer at the hotel. Dora was staying on with us. Aunt Mary took entire charge of the household, and Mimi was thus left free to ride with me, to work with me, and as the fall days gave more leisure, to sit by the fire and put infinitesimal stitches in yards of fine white muslin.

So winter came once more, and the snow shut us in. And on Christmas morning, we lighted a candle on a tiny tree, in honor of our small son—Stephen.

We named him after my father. I wanted him to be like my father. And like his mother. What better inheritance could he have than that?

All the little Hayeses came down to see the tree, and Aunt Mary brought the baby in, wrapped in her red cloak.

And Timothy Hayes said, "He makes me think of *Snow White* and *Rose Red.* If he had a fairy godmother, what gift would you ask her to give him?"

He was very serious about it, so I, too, became serious, though I felt that all the bells of the world should be ringing, with a son like that; and Mimi strong, thank God, and happy.

But I set myself to answer Timothy, "The greatest gifts are a simple soul, and a steadfast heart."

I could see that Timothy was disappointed. He wanted something more spectacular—diamonds, perhaps, as big as roc's eggs! Or pearls worth a king's ransom!

3

It was after our son was born that Mimi wrote to her mother. They had had little correspondence. But now that she had a child of her own, my wife felt there should be between herself and her own

mother, if possible, sympathy and understanding. "I want her to know the truth," she said, "that we haven't any money. She has a right to feel hurt that we haven't helped her."

An answer came back immediately. Mrs. Le Brun was married to a man of large fortune whom she had met in Florida. The announcement came in the same mail. "I did not tell you before, Mimi, because you seemed to have no interest in my affairs. I was much surprised to find that you were not rolling in wealth. Everybody here has an idea that Jerry has shut you up in a sort of feudal castle, and that you dine on gold plate, and have phalanxes of servants. You had better come back to St. Louis, and let me make you comfortable. I must say, however, that I am surprised you did not name the boy after your grandfather."

Mimi, folding up the letter, said, "She can't understand, of course. I couldn't let her do things for me. But she means well."

She did not speak of what her mother had said about the Senator's name for our boy. I knew that she had hidden away in her heart the memory of her grandfather, and all he had meant to her. Even in the midst of her happiness, the hurt was still there.

It was when the spring came that we began to feel the pressure of the great war. Foodstuffs

were needed. We tilled and planted. We harvested. Our crops sold. I had no time to write. I was down among my men, leading them, and at the same time learning. Mimi's hens and ducks went regularly to Denver. And the trademark on her boxes of fresh eggs was a peacock's feather!

We had a pair of peacocks now—the forerunners of the future appendages to our palace! They trailed their gorgeousness on what would some day be our terraces. Mimi made a screen of their feathers, set between glass, and it winked at our fire with all its scintillating eyes.

So a year passed—two, and our country went into the war. More need now for planting, for harvesting. Our ranch assumed, all at once, a national importance. The patriotism of the men who tilled the soil was set side by side with that of the men who fought in the trenches.

No time to write! But how I lived! Wresting from the rich earth all that it would give. Putting potatoes, cabbages, corn—sowing every spare acre in wheat. Aunt Mary dried and canned our fruits and vegetables. Mimi gathered together groups of the mountain women and taught them to conserve.

As for my father, it was marvellous to see him. Strong in body and in spirit, he tramped over the hills. He found remote habitations and took to them good cheer and the gospel. He took also

his own idealistic belief that men should fight for great causes. And he brought in many recruits.

Another year of it, and then the Armistice. There was time now to take stock of ourselves, to find that out of our dynamic energies we had won experience. We could go on with security. The future held for us no fears.

The letters which came from overseas told us that Bernice and Lionel were still staying on in Paris. Lionel's stories were attracting much attention. It was, indeed, not long before he wrote the book which brought him fame. Andy had been wounded, and had been decorated for distinguished service. Olga's husband, although he had a German name, had fought on the side of the Allies.

We had paid Olga what we owed her. She had not wanted to take it, but we had insisted. Since then we had heard nothing from her.

In June, following the Armistice, my wife and I rode up one day from our morning's work, and found Aunt Mary in a flutter.

"A lady telephoned," she said. "She and her husband are coming to dinner."

Dinner meant to us, at that time, our midday meal. We had, during the war, sacrificed some of our formalities, and had adopted the mountain customs.

We often had unexpected guests. so Mimi took the news lightly. "Who is it?"

Aunt Mary's eyes danced. She was anticipating the sensation her words would make. "It is your step-grandmother."

"Olga?" Mimi's tone was incredulous.

"Yes. And Dora has stewed chicken and dumplings."

I knew Dora's stewed chicken dinners. Served country style. All on one platter. Delicious. Primitive.

"She'd better add a salad," Mimi directed, then hurried to her room. "I've got to dress," she said, over her shoulder.

I followed her, "Don't dress, my dear."

"Why not?"

"Because you are simply stunning as you are."

"'Tunning," echoed small Stephen who had accompanied me.

Stephen had a tawny mane like his mother's. Otherwise he resembled me.

"You are two of a kind," Mimi told us, "saying the same things, and standing there with your hands in your pockets."

Stephen's pockets were in knickers of orange linen which matched his mane. "I like my hands in them," was his somewhat smug response, "and I like to say the same things as Daddy."

Mimi laughed, "Well, run along now, and you and Daddy wash your hands and faces. I've got to fix my hair."

Then, as she reached the door, she said, "I wonder why Olga is coming, Jerry?"

"Perhaps, to show us her husband."

"She seems able to annex husbands easily," coolly, "doesn't she?"

She could not even then, you see, be quite fair to "the Ogre."

When later she joined us in the living-room, she was glowing with her quick toilette. She had put on a fresh silk shirt, and wore a tie of her favorite blue, but she was still in her riding clothes.

A huge limousine lumbered, presently, up the hill. The roads were, at that time, rough, and the chauffeur's face wore a look of extreme exasperation.

As he came at last to a stop before our modest domicile, the look of exasperation gave way to one of ill-concealed contempt. He touched his hat in a perfunctory manner, and got down to open the door of the car.

But I was before him, and was saying with all my heart, "Olga, how good of you to come!"

Her florid countenance was set in more mature lines than when I had last seen it, but she was beaming as she held out her hand to us.

"Aren't you surprised, Jerry? And you haven't met Max?"

The face of the man beside her was as beaming

as her own. There was something very appealing in their eager friendliness.

I am sure that Mimi saw it as I did. For she put her arms about Olga and kissed her. And Olga's eyes filled suddenly with tears. "You are a darling," she said, "to give me such a welcome."

"I'd be a beast," said Mimi, and meant it, "if I didn't."

Our guests swept into our ugly house and did not see its ugliness. They saw only its hospitality. The air was cool, and there was a little fire on the hearth. Olga, sitting beside it in her blue silk gown, had a billowy effect like the waves of the sea. Dora, coming in and out, gazed at her spellbound. She spoke of her always, afterwards, as "the pretty lady." She was, I am sure, much more impressed by Olga's blonde beauty than she had ever been by Mimi's more delicate charms.

The table, when at last dinner was announced, was very attractive with its gray linen squares, its centerpiece of pale marsh violets. We stood while my father said grace. I can't tell you how proud I was of him, with his pleasant voice, his straight figure, and his fine head.

Olga sat at my right, and as I talked to her I was aware that she had, indeed, found happiness. She had never been quite at ease with her Senator-husband—with his fastidious tastes—his aristocratic habits. She had always been self-conscious

in the society of those with whom she had mingled, as his wife. She was not self-conscious with this later love—because he was as ingenuous as herself.

She spoke of Mimi, "She is more beautiful than ever."

"It is the life she lives. She loves it."

I could see that she was skeptical. "But she adored luxury, Jerry. Do you think this will content her always?"

"Why look ahead?"

Across the table she challenged Mimi, frankly. "So you are really glad you married him?"

And Mimi said, lightly, "He is priceless, Olga. I couldn't do without him."

Lightly said, but not lightly meant. I knew it by the depth of feeling in her voice.

4

After dinner, my father and Aunt Mary left us with our guests. Stephen went with his grandfather, Jason following. The old dog adored the child, and was his constant companion.

And when we were alone, Olga said, "Max and I have come to ask you to take some of the money, Mimi."

The set of Mimi's head gave her a startled air, like a young deer come upon unawares.

"I thought we had settled that long ago, Olga."

"No. We have more than enough, Max and I. And I want to divide it between you and Lionel. I have always felt you ought to have it, even when I wouldn't admit it."

"If Grandfather had wanted me to have it, Olga, he would have said so."

"He did say so," some of the pink had faded from Olga's cheeks. "I came across an old diary of his the other day. Max has it. Show it to Mimi, Max."

Her husband brought out of his pocket a small book bound in black leather. He turned the pages until he found a certain date, then handed it to my wife.

She read it, flushed and paled, then read aloud what the Senator had written: " 'I ought to change my will. Mimi must have her share. Tomorrow I will speak to Olga.' "

"He never spoke to me," Olga explained. "Oh, I hope you will believe that. He died the next day."

We did believe it. Whatever other faults she might have, Olga was not dishonest. She had laid the diary away without looking in it, and it was only by chance that she had gotten it out again, hoping to find certain memoranda which might relate to other affairs.

Mimi, holding the little book close, said, "It isn't the money which matters so much, but the fact that he thought of me."

She was finding it very hard to get control of her-

self, and I knew that tears were near the surface. So I spoke for her.

"We are very happy here. I am not sure that money could make us happier."

"Well, it could make life easier," said the practical Olga, "you know that, Jerry."

And then Mimi flung a question at her, "Why should life be easy?"

"Oh, well, everybody knows," Olga informed her, with a certain complacency, "that it is much nicer that way."

She knew it at any rate. She came of a stock which measured its felicities by feather-beds and rocking chairs and huge feasts four times a day. And her modern interpretation of the things which make people happy was her puffy black and gold furniture, her luxurious limousine, her fat chocolate cakes with her coffee.

Each to his own ideal! There was Mimi, slender as a boy, fit as a fiddle, ready to ride with the best of us, her mind meeting keenly the problems of the day's work—her heart satisfied!

"And anyhow," Olga was saying, "if you don't want the money for yourself, you will want it for the boy."

"Stephen! Oh, why should I want it for Stephen?" was Mimi's impetuous demand. "I don't want him to lean on the thought of an inheritance, as Lionel and I leaned. It colored everything for

us. Some day we were to have Grandfather's money; the time between was simply to be bridged over as best we could. Why, until Jerry was ill, I never knew there was anything in me that would *count*. I am not sure that I can make you understand. Everybody liked me because I was good-looking and wore pretty clothes. But I had never really liked myself——"

She was putting it in her whimsical way, smiling a little as she said it. But I knew she was in dead earnest. She had won her own self-respect by achievement. Few women of her class ever know the thrill of that feeling.

Her bright glance surveyed us. "Of course, this doesn't mean that I am going to renounce the pomp and vanities of the world. I am human, and I know what money will mean to us up here. But I am half afraid of it——"

I knew that she was afraid for Stephen. I held out my hand to her, "Why should we be afraid of anything?" I asked her.

She came over and sat on the arm of my chair. "Well, I'm not really. And it will be wonderful, won't it, Jerry, to build our—shining palace?"

My imagination leaped to meet hers. The thing of which we had once despaired had come to pass. And I was glad it had not come before. For my wife was mine and I was hers in a way we could never have been had we not been tested and tried.

We had fought shoulder to shoulder in the battle of life. We would reach the heights together.

5

The money which Olga at once made over to us changed, to some extent, our mode of living. We have a long, low house, as enchanting as the one I pictured when as a boy I listened to Uncle Jerry's glowing eloquence. We have books and a big car which keep us in touch with the outside world. My wife wears shimmering silken evening things, and Aunt Mary, for the first time in her life, owns a dinner gown—it is like a flame and she loves it. My father preaches in a little church which we have built for him on the mountainside, and its bells call the people from far and wide to worship.

Yet our days are, as a rule, busy ones. Mimi and I manage the farm. We have blooded stock and pedigreed poultry, our little ducks still go down to the water to swim; Mimi still coddles her old hens, looks after the lambs, and feeds the pigeons.

And our small Stephen grows sturdily—a lad who belongs to the hills and sky, to the forest and streams. He has no thought of his inheritance. He has a thousand things to do. As for the rest, we can only pray that God will keep him.

Our happiest days are those when Mimi and Stephen and I ride up into the mountains—Mimi in gray tweed or corduroy; in her hat the tip of a pea-

cock's feather as when I first saw her. Sometimes we ride for days, seeking some high, clear lake—reaching timberline, breathing the thin upper air. We have nights under the stars, when, with Stephen asleep, we talk of the things my father said to me long years before, by a lily-scented pool.

"No one can be rich, Jerry, with a starved soul."

We know, Mimi and I, that it is not our money which makes us rich, nor is it, indeed, our achievements. It is, rather, our aspirations, and our love of each other and the boy.

Some day I am going to write the book which I have planned. But the time has not yet come. Meanwhile, I have penned these simple chronicles —of a boy who dreamed, and of a girl who made his dreams come true.

TEMPLE BAILEY

An Autobiography

TEMPLE BAILEY

ALTHOUGH my ancestry is all of New England, I was born in the old town of Petersburg, Virginia. I went later to Richmond, and finally at the age of five to Washington, D. C., returning to Richmond for a few years in a girls' school, which was picturesquely quartered in General Lee's mansion, now Virginia Historical Association.

I think it was, perhaps, because of my life in cities that I learned in early years to appreciate the romance of them, the picturesqueness, the charm. It was, indeed, one reason for my adoration of Dickens, that he made London a place of dear delights, finding in crowded squares and quiet streets the human stories.

I was not a strong child, and my school-life was somewhat intermittent, but my father in my out-of-school days supervised my English as carefully as my mother supervised my manners. I had to write themes which my father blue-penciled, and so I came to girlhood and finally to womanhood with a rather easy gift of writing. But I really did not want to write. I was not in the least ambitious for a career. I was tremendously interested in people. I have, in fact, been always an intensely social person, liking my kind, and clinging somewhat stubbornly to old

ideals of democracy and the doctrine that "a man's a man for a' that."

There came, however, a season of stress and sorrow which drove me to self-expression. I scribbled a story or two, and found, eventually, that editors liked them. A prize came to me from a love-story contest in the Ladies' Home Journal, and I was much encouraged. After that, I wrote children's stories, a child's book, love stories; appearing at last in the pages of Harper's, Scribner's, the Saturday Evening Post, the Outlook, Collier's, and most of the women's magazines.

A series of novels followed. The first was "Glory of Youth," then "Contrary Mary," "Mistress Anne," "The Tin Soldier," "The Trumpeter Swan," "The Gay Cockade," "The Dim Lantern," and my latest book, "Peacock Feathers."

Many of my books have Washington as a background, because I know it best, but whether I range from Boston and Nantucket to Maryland and the Chesapeake, or on to the Rockies and the Pacific Coast, I find that while people are modified by environment, they are fundamentally alike, and that the drama of life is as ancient as Genesis, and as modern as an airship.

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